

CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers



Health
insurance
NEW BEST BUYS

Honey for
healing?

Buying Australian

MIXED MESSAGES
ON THE LABELS

Tests

MID-SIZE FRIDGES

PORTABLE CD
PLAYERS

HYBRID BIKES

TOOTHPASTE



'Made in Australia': does it mean what you'd expect?

Whether or not you 'buy Australian' is a personal decision with a lot of factors to assess — see this month's article on page 10 for a round-up of them. But there's no excuse for allowing 'country of origin' labels to mislead consumers about where a product comes from if you do decide you want to buy Australian products.

For a start, 'Made in Australia' doesn't mean what it clearly implies. The law (the Trade Practices Act) is complex, but the upshot is that it's perfectly possible for a product to carry this label yet still contain ingredients sourced from overseas and/or for some of its production to have taken place overseas.

Under current labelling laws the closest you'll get to buying a product both sourced and made here is 'Product of Australia'. To use that label, every significant component must originate in Australia, and all or most of the production processes must take place here.

Food labelling is the system at its worst. Labels on processed food have to conform to the Food Standard Code as well as the TPA, and it seems the labelling requirements for the two aren't consistent. CHOICE thinks it's possible, for example, for a food manufacturer to use the labelling claim 'Made in Australia' and comply with the code without complying with the Act. This absurd lack of consistency makes it almost impossible for consumers to make informed choices.

There's more on the labelling issue in our article, but the worst of it is that many consumers do care and want to buy Australian — research indicates 80% of people seek out Australian products. With this level of interest and support, the confused and confusing labelling laws simply aren't good enough.

Jane Mackenzie, Editor

CHOICE

is published by the Australian Consumers' Association

YOUR LETTERS

We welcome the letters you send us — please always include a daytime telephone number so we can contact you quickly if we want to follow up your letter. We're sorry we can't personally answer every letter we receive, but we do use them in our research. Thanks for taking the time to keep in touch.

CONTACT US

WRITE to us at CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.

PHONE us on (02) 9577 3399.

FAX us on (02) 9577 3355.

EMAIL us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

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CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE

www.choice.com.au

If you're a current CHOICE subscriber you can have free trial access to our website. Just call Consumer Services on (02) 9577 3399 and have your email address ready. As well as finding all the articles in CHOICE there, you can use COMPARE A PRODUCT (type in your requirements and let the database find the right model for you), participate in our forums, catch up on our latest campaigns, tell us what you think about us and order books or single reports from our shop.



REQUEST A TEST

If you've seen something you'd like us to test, email us at requeststest@choice.com.au or call us on (02) 9577 3399.

The Australian Consumers' Association is a non-profit, non-party-political organisation, established in 1959 to provide consumers with information and advice on goods, services, health and personal finances, and to help maintain and enhance their quality of life. It's a Council member of Consumers International.

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We test and rate products and services. Our ratings are usually based on quality without regard to price, and are derived from lab tests, expert judgments and reader surveys. If a product is high in quality and relatively low in price, we deem it a **Best Buy**. A rating applies only to the brand and model tested, not to other models sold under the same brand name, unless so noted. Financial information in CHOICE is of a general nature, and is not intended to be advice on individual investments.

We represent and act in consumers' interests. We lobby and campaign on behalf of consumers to promote their rights, to influence government policy, and to ensure consumer issues have a high profile in the public arena.

Membership. Subscribers can become voting members of the Consumers' Association on application. Voting membership costs \$89.10 for a year, which covers your subscription to CHOICE with free access to CHOICE Online and a further subscription to our policy and campaigning magazine, *Consuming Interest*.

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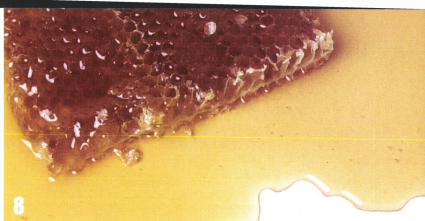
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Hard up for cash? Don't borrow this way

Payday loans — short-term cash advances for a couple of weeks (until your next payday) — are a relatively new development in Australia, with outlets opening around the country. The glossy ads tell the story for these new lenders — no hassles, no delay, easy loans for everyone. But payday loans come with a big kick: excessive and unfair 'charges' — their way around the word 'interest' and therefore the credit laws.

THE PAYDAY DEBT TRAP

It's hassle-free to get a payday loan — any income, including social security, will do. But it's not hassle-free once you've got it. For example:

- There's the very high cost, which is unfair and exploitative, especially for those already in a cash crunch — see below and right for a couple of examples.
- Loans can be 'rolled over' again and again from one loan period to the next, gaining more fees each time and creating debt traps. A Queensland government report noted one case where a \$50 loan ended up costing \$980, rolled over with extra fees for months.
- Some lenders take security for loans, such as cars and household goods, which have been repossessed with little notice.

Because of a legal loophole, payday loans aren't currently covered by our credit laws, leaving consumers with limited protection.

CHOICE GOES UNDERCOVER

We decided to check out these loans for ourselves, and borrowed \$200 for two weeks from a Sydney payday lender — part of a national chain offering loans to people short of cash.

The two-week, \$200 loan came with fees of \$74.50, including an annual \$25 'joining fee'. This equates to an annual interest rate of 972% — an unbelievable charge.

The store was bright and bank-like, with glass teller screens and writing desks to fill in the application. Staff members were helpful and upfront, but said the fees we were paying weren't interest — in fact, the loan was "really interest-free". We received a reminder call on the day the loan was due, and courteous treatment. Nice service: shame about the outrageous cost.

And while we were there, another borrower came in with a word of warning: "Have you got anywhere else to borrow money? Because if you do, then don't come here." He told us he'd borrowed \$50 and was repaying

WANT TO COOK GREAT RICE?

If you eat rice often and want to make life a little easier, or you just have trouble getting it to turn out

right, it could be worth trying a rice cooker. In a recent CHOICE test all the models we looked at cooked great rice. The main

differences were how long they took and how messy they were to clean up (though they were all easier than washing a saucepan after cooking rice in it, especially if it's boiled over).

The top three models were the **RONSON 8424** (\$90), **PANASONIC SR-W10FKP** (\$101) and the **BLACK & DECKER BRC100**, which at \$48 is the **Best Buy**.

Rice almost doubles in volume when it's cooked so, for example, two cups of uncooked rice are enough for three or four people. That's the minimum you can cook in any of the tested models; the maximum varies from six to 10 cups of uncooked rice.

(Of the top three, the **RONSON** and **B&D** take 10 cups, the **PANASONIC** 5.5.)

If you cook more than you need for one meal, cool it quickly

by running cold water over it and keep it in the fridge, to prevent the food-poisoning bacterium *Bacillus cereus* growing in it.

You can cook all kinds of rice in the cookers, and all the tested models also have a steamer for other types of food, such as vegetables, fish and chicken. Of the three top models, the **RONSON** and **B&D** steamers are the most convenient — you just sit the basket over the rice and steam the other food at the same time.

If you'd like more information on the tested models, go to www.choice.com.au and type 'rice cookers' in the search box. CHOICE subscribers can have free trial access to the website: if you haven't registered already, just call Consumer Services on (02) 9577 3399 and have your email address ready.



VANESSA MARSHALL

PAY DAY LOAN SHARKING



CHOICE
protestors
outside a
branch of one
of the payday
lender chains.

\$140 — after just a couple of weeks. His sole payment made it difficult to cover the loan costs.

Even if you dress up interest rates as 'fees' and call borrowers 'members', there's a strong case that payday lending is unfair, exploitative and preys on vulnerable consumers. Credit at any cost is unfair and exploitative — and these charges are unacceptable.

Extend credit laws

Ministers have promised to bring payday lending under credit laws — legislation has already been brought to the NSW Parliament. Credit law coverage will be an important step and will give consumers much-needed protection. But we also want to see charges capped, so that excessive and exploitative charges can't be levied, and a commitment to fast action. CHOICE will be working with other consumer groups to get these reforms.

Digital cameras come of age

Can you find an affordable digital camera that matches the performance of a 35 mm compact camera? Our sister magazine *ComputerCHOICE* looked at nine digital cameras of varying price, with maximum resolutions ranging from 1.9 to 4.3 million pixels. (Advertising often equates the number of pixels with performance but, as with normal cameras, there's more to good performance than just one aspect.) Surprisingly, given the poorer performance of earlier models, all of them produced images as sharp as or even sharper than a compact camera.

Another surprise is that there's no relationship between cost, number of pixels and picture quality, though some people will still find any of these cameras out of their price range.

- The **KODAK DC3800**, for example, is the cheapest camera in the test at \$899, has around 2.3 million pixels and came second for picture quality. It also downloads images fast, but doesn't have a zoom lens.
- The **LEICA Digilux 4.3**, on the other hand, has over 4.3 million pixels, costs \$1890 and was equal last for picture quality.
- The **SONY MVC-CD1000** was the most expensive at



\$2999 and wasn't far behind the **KODAK** for picture quality; it has 1.9 million pixels.

- The **NIKON Coolpix 880** at \$1849 was by far the easiest to use and has good picture quality, while the \$1999 **CASIO QV-3000EX/IR**'s picture quality is slightly better.
- The **SONY DSC-S70** (\$2089) has the best picture quality and the second best download time, but isn't as easy to use.

For more, see *ComputerCHOICE*, May/June 2001, or read the web version at www.choice.com.au (type 'digital cameras come of age' in the search box). If you'd like to subscribe to *ComputerCHOICE*, call Consumer Services on (02) 9577 3399.

AND THE WINNER IS...

The winner of the prize draw for completing our recent survey on car reliability is William van Heeswyk of Pictou, NSW. He wins a 68 cm television.

Many thanks to the more than 17,000 of you who sent back the survey, giving us over 21,000 cars to report on. Look out for the results in an upcoming issue.

Into the mouths of babes...

As if we didn't know it, new research supports CHOICE's (and others') old argument that TV ads influence the choices of food children make, even when they're as young as two.

Researchers in the US recently embedded 30-second ads for specific foods in a popular cartoon video, and then asked children aged from two to six to identify their preferences from pairs of similar food products.

The kids who saw the video with the embedded food ads were significantly more likely to choose the advertised items than children who saw the same video without commercials. This led the researchers to suggest that even brief exposure to food ads on TV can influence the food preferences of preschool children.

What can you do? Limit how much TV with ads your

children watch. In the past CHOICE has raised the issue of inappropriate food advertising to children, with no noticeable impact on regulators or advertisers. So it's up to you: just don't let your kids see the ads if you don't want them to develop expensive food preferences or unhealthy eating habits.

The May 2001 issue of CHOICE *Health Reader* reported on this research. In the same issue it also reported on another study, on the relationship of obesity to the risk of cancer.

Recent Swedish research followed more than 28,000 people diagnosed as being overweight or obese over the 28-year period from 1965 to 1993. Their cancer rates were compared with the expected rate in the general community and found to be significantly higher. What's more, a wide range of cancers was involved, including the small intestine, colon, gall bladder,



SIMON BOSCH

pancreas, larynx, bladder, kidney, cervix, uterus, endometrium, ovary and brain. Risks ranged from an increase of around 30% (such as for colon cancer) to more than 280% (small intestine).

As *Health Reader* notes, these findings add to the wide range of diseases now linked with obesity, making it one of the single biggest

health risk factors in the western world. Is there a message there about giving our children food preferences based on TV advertising from the age of two?

If you'd like to subscribe to CHOICE *Health Reader*, call our Consumer Services on (02) 9577 3399.

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

Secret lunches solved...

Worried that little Tommy's not eating the right tucker at school? Earlier this year, Ireland's *Consumer Choice* reported on a smart card system trialled in British school cafeterias.

The card not only ensures children spend their cash at school, it has a loyalty scheme, gives extra points for healthier options and has a website information zone that lets parents track what's been bought. A nation of Poyepes in the making, or Big Brother gone mad?

ewe LOOKING FOR A FAMILY?

Not sure if you're ready for kids yet? According to *Protegez-Vous* from Canada, for around \$245 you can now adopt — an Italian sheep!

Apparently you select one over the Internet, and in return you get eight kilos of cheese, six pairs of knitted woollen socks and packets of dung to use as fertiliser from your woolly little dear.

Maybe Aussie farmers on hard times could try it.



SPRAYED TO DEATH

A 16-year-old boy from Manchester, Jonathan Capewell, may be the first known person to have overdosed on deodorant, reports India's consumer magazine *Insight*.

According to Jonathan's parents, he sprayed his whole body with deodorant at least twice a day. "He just wanted to smell good," his father said.

Jonathan's autopsy — after a sudden heart attack — showed 10 times the lethal dose of propane and butane in his blood. Now his family is demanding warning labels for deodorant cans. Not a bad idea.

YOUR LETTERS

Marketing practices are a thorn in the side of many consumers.

Cold calling and marketing lists

My partner and I have been subscribing to CHOICE for many years now, and we couldn't think of a better magazine to subscribe to. Your articles are incredibly informative and worth their weight in gold; they've easily saved us the cost of the subscription.

However, I'm now writing with great concern about cold calling and marketing lists. About a year ago we started receiving four or five letters per week personally addressed to either me or my partner. At first I ignored them and threw them away. Not long after this, we started receiving cold calls, mainly after 6 pm on weeknights or after 9 am on weekends. We have a silent number, so I wondered why we were receiving this influx of marketing information by phone and mail. I tried to find out from the operators where they got our phone number (as I'm aware they sometimes dial randomly), but to no avail.

When we received the next piece of marketing mail I called and asked the operator to be removed from the list, only to be told we weren't on its list and that my details had been rented from a marketing list from the Australian Direct Marketing Association (ADMA).

I called ADMA and was amazed to find that there's a separate contact number just for having

your details removed — does this indicate there's a huge demand for this service? A prerecorded message gave me information on how to have my details removed, and explained that I needed to supply my full name, address, phone number and date of birth. These details, and the request to be removed, had to be received in written form and would only be removed once every three months.

I hesitated to give out the details at first — wasn't I adding fuel to fire? — but eventually sent them and received a letter back from ADMA. It confirmed this 'free consumer service' and explained that my 'do not mail/do not call' registration is valid for two years, after which time I have to re-register. It also confirmed that deletions from its lists only occur four times a year.

The marketing letters have almost stopped and we haven't received any cold calls. However, there are two things that have amazed and puzzled me out of this whole experience. How did I get on the ADMA marketing list in the first place? And why do I have to re-register every two years?

Why can't the organisation take my letter as "I never want to be on this list again"? How does ADMA get away with this? And why don't consumers have greater rights or protection when it comes to how our names and personal

details are used? In the end, don't I own my personal details?

Naomi Davies
via Internet

In response to privacy legislation protecting consumers, ADMA has in fact changed some conditions for its 'do not mail/do not call' register:

■ It's now permanent till you revoke it. (ADMA said the previous re-registration requirement every two years was in order to keep records updated, because Australians move house rather often.) Let ADMA know your new details when you move so your request remains up-to-date.

■ It'll be circulated to ADMA members on a monthly rather than three-monthly basis — but don't expect an instant decline in unsolicited mail; advertisers may take longer to update their records. (The list will also be sent to non-members who have registered with ADMA for this service.)

If you don't want to receive advertising mail, ADMA requires your written request indicating your name, address, postcode and, if you also want to register for 'do not call', your phone number. There's no need to disclose your date of birth. Send a card or letter to: Do Not Mail Register, Reply Paid 38, PO Box 464, Kings Cross 1340, or register your request at www.adma.com.au/consumer/callRegistration.asp.

THUMBS UP



Dr Nusheen Vahdat of Brighton, Victoria, awards a thumbs up to Colin Jackman at ART HANG UPS, who had done a good job on various occasions hanging a large picture frame. When a year later the frame came apart on one side, he came back immediately, apologised and replaced the nails used with better-quality ones, all free-of-charge.

And on the matter of mailing lists, they don't originate from ADMA. It's an association of companies involved in direct marketing. These member companies, however, may rent out or exchange their own lists.

Don't bother responding

I sympathise with those trying to earn a living through telemarketing, and I try to be polite even though I never agree to overtures of any kind from this medium.

I find the practice invasive and extremely irritating, and lately it's reached new heights of absurdity. I answered the phone recently to a fruity, ingratiating voice which gave me the usual spiel about being chosen to receive a special deal, this one for home security.

When I attempted to say, "No, thank you", the voice continued as if I'd not spoken, and I realised it was recorded as it said: "Press button 9 ...". I hung up in disbelief.

Do they really think people will not only listen to a recording, but go through the pushbutton routine for some non-solicited promotional rubbish? It's bad enough when you must endure it to reach a business or utility. Life's becoming too ridiculous.

Judith Rowe
Yandina, Queensland

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us, too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Naomi Davies, receives *Saving Spending Splurging* or any other book of her choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 29 to 31.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.



HONEY: what's the buzz?

It's great on toast, but honey is also emerging as a cure for everything from open wounds to stomach ulcers. Is there any truth in it?

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Pure honey** is composed mostly of the sugars glucose, fructose and a small amount of sucrose. Nutritionally, it's no better or more 'natural' than table sugar.

■ **Honey may be able to help in the healing process** — it has recognised antibacterial properties.

NOT FOR BABIES!

Don't dip that dummy in honey. Children under one year old should *not* eat honey because it may contain *C. botulinum* spores, which can cause infant botulism. This is a rare but serious disease, and babies are particularly susceptible because they lack the bacteria in their intestinal system to control the botulinum spores. Once they're one year old, they can generally begin to eat honey without problems.

Honey's been used for thousands of years as a treatment for a range of ailments — we're all familiar with its use as an ingredient in many cold remedies. Only in recent times, though, has the scientific community begun to take its antibacterial healing properties more seriously.

It's well established that honey has an antimicrobial effect because of its high sugar and low water content (many micro-organisms require water to grow), its acidity, and most importantly the presence of hydrogen peroxide, a major antibacterial factor. It doesn't lose these antimicrobial effects when it's pasteurised to be sold.

It's gradually gaining acceptance in treating conditions where an antibacterial is required, such as directly applied to healing wounds, including burns, and several other ailments where micro-organisms play a part, such as stomach ulcers. However, its effectiveness depends on a number of variables:

■ **Type of bacteria:** some species of bacteria can live with very little water, so the high sugar/low water content effect depends on the species of bacteria.

■ **Acidity:** the effect of acidity, which inhibits most micro-organisms, only applies to undiluted honey. Once it's diluted by body fluids, for example, its pH will rise and it may not be as effective.

■ **Hydrogen peroxide:** the enzymes that produce hydrogen peroxide are only present while honey is ripening, and will only become active in fully ripened honey when it's diluted, such as in body fluid.

WHAT IS 'ACTIVE' HONEY?

Research shows honey from certain plant species has a factor that increases its antibacterial effect,



Antibacterial honeys: it's not known why they have a stronger effect than regular honey, but research shows that they can help heal wounds.

counteracting to some extent the potential loss of antibacterial action. Researchers haven't yet isolated what this mystery antibacterial factor is.

Honey that contains it is called 'active' honey, and is sourced from some *Leptospermum* species in Australia and some Manuka honey from the same species in New Zealand. Although they don't know what gives this honey its increased effect, Manuka honey producers have developed a rating system, called the Unique Manuka Factor or UMF, which measures the



antibacterial power of the honey and relates this to the antibacterial power of phenol (a kind of antiseptic). The scale is from UMF10 to 18, and to be labelled with this rating, honey has to be tested.

Medihoney is the only product currently being produced in Australia for its antibacterial properties. While there's no rating system in Australia, its maker, Capilano, says every batch is tested by the Queensland Department of Primary Industry to ensure the antibacterial factor is equivalent to or higher than UMF10.

The test for Medihoney's antibacterial qualities is based on its ability to kill golden staph, which is becoming more widespread and is a major problem due to its resistance to some antibiotics. Medihoney is starting to be used as a treatment for wounds in public hospitals in Queensland.

AND THE PRICE?

You can generally only buy honey tested for its antimicrobial activity from health food shops or pharmacies, and it'll cost you a lot more than a regular jar of honey from the supermarket. The products we bought ranged from \$7.95 to \$21 for 250–375 g.

CHOICE VERDICT

If you think it's worth a try, do it under your GP's supervision, and bear in mind that unless you use honey that's been tested, the particular honey you're using may not have any evidence to show it's effective. And if you have a wound that isn't healing, see your GP — failure to heal could be an indication of a more serious condition. ■

SO WHAT IS HONEY?

A honey bee's hive has 40,000 to 60,000 workers, 500 to 1000 drones and one queen. Bees collect nectar, a sugary juice, from flowers and store it in a special honey stomach; honey that a bee produces for storage never actually enters its digestive system. A biological valve prevents it from mixing with nectar that's being digested.

Back at the hive it's mixed with secretions from their glands that contain enzymes and convert the sucrose in the nectar into glucose and fructose. It's then deposited in the comb, where the bee seals it with wax; the water content gradually reduces and it ripens into honey. It takes 500 bees four weeks to collect enough nectar to make one kilo of honey.

Thank you, bees

Luckily for us, bees make much more honey than they can eat themselves. The honeycomb frames are removed from the hive and the wax seal scraped off. The honey is then spun out of the comb using a honey extractor, and drained into storage tanks.

The flavour and colour of the honey depends on the type of flower the nectar comes from. The colour can range from very light and almost colourless to a very dark amber, just as the flavour can vary from mild to quite strong. As a general rule, the lighter the honey, the milder the taste.

Storing honey

It's been said that honey discovered in the pyramids of Egypt was found to be edible after thousands of years. Stored properly in an airtight container, it can last for decades or even centuries. However, it's still susceptible to physical and chemical changes during storage, including losing its aroma and flavour, so about two years is a reasonable guide. Honey is best stored at 18–24°C.

Honey can become thick and cloudy due to crystallisation of the glucose. The rate at which this occurs depends on the origin of the honey and how it's processed and handled. 'Creamed' honeys have had crystallisation induced.

If you have honey that's crystallised, stand it in hot water for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, or put it in the microwave on a medium setting for 30 seconds to return it to a runnier consistency. Store it in an airtight container to prevent it from absorbing external moisture, which can contribute to crystallisation.

CAUTION: ROYAL JELLY

Royal jelly is a milky secretion from the salivary glands of honey bees. It's usually available in capsules, and is said to act as a 'health tonic' and miracle cure for a number of conditions. However, there's no evidence that it has a therapeutic benefit for humans. In fact it can be dangerous and potentially fatal because it can cause severe allergic reactions in asthma and allergy sufferers. All products containing royal jelly must by law contain a statement on the packaging that the product has been reported to cause severe allergic reactions.
CHOICE advice: Don't waste your money on royal jelly: it's potentially dangerous and has no proven benefits.



SIMON ROSCH

Can you really help the economy by buying Australian? And how do you *know* you're getting the genuine article?

SHOP FOR THE NATION?

IN A NUTSHELL

- Over 80% of consumers think it's important to 'buy Australian', but there's confusion about what that actually means — and an abundance of labelling claims, symbols and logos makes it difficult to identify true-blue Australian products anyway.
- Our labelling laws are complex, with many loopholes. It's too easy for manufacturers and distributors to mislead consumers about the origin of their products.
- There's not much hard evidence to prove 'buy Australian' campaigns can make a major difference to the economy. Many other local and international factors are likely to have a stronger influence than how we fill our shopping trolleys.

We're told that 'buying Australian' can create jobs, reduce foreign debt, strengthen the dollar — even make the price of petrol go down. Flag-clad characters like Dick Smith and Big Kev say that consumer support for their 'dinky-di' products can improve Australia's prosperity and give future generations better living standards.

Consumers must believe it because research shows many of us make a conscious effort to buy Australian (see *We know you care* on page 16). However, there's a lot of confusion surrounding the issue.

One campaign promotes Australian manufacturing; another says the critical issue is Australian ownership. The recent court case between Panadol and Herron (see page 14) shows how complicated this issue can be.

Our 'country of origin' labelling laws are adding to the uncertainty. They're simply inadequate and don't give consumers reliable information. Products you think are Aussie may be made from imported ingredients or partly made overseas.

Is it really worth searching out Australian products amid all this confusion? And how can you decide which products to search for?

Should you buy Australian?

'Buy Australian' campaigns are based on the idea that Australia's economy is under threat. The most extreme arguments claim that if we don't stop imports and foreign ownership, Australia's living standards will fall dramatically. More moderate arguments say some foreign investment is OK but we need to support local manufacturing to create jobs and be able to compete in the world market.

An alternative view is that all buy Australian campaigns are jingoistic and simplistic. Foreign investment and international competition are the way of the future. Which argument, if any, can you really believe?

ARGUMENTS FOR

The Australian dollar recently slumped to its weakest value ever — below 50 US cents (see *What's happened to the dollar?*, right). Buy Australian campaigners point to the dollar's weakness as evidence the Australian economy is in trouble.

Australia's escalating foreign debt is seen as another major symptom of our economic vulnerability.

According to the Australian Companies Institute, in 1976 our net foreign debt was \$3133 million. By 1999 it was \$230,129 million or \$12,240 per person. By September 2000 it was \$294,455 million.

All buy Australian campaigns offer similar 'solutions' to these economic problems. They claim Australia must manufacture more, export more and import less.

A groundswell of consumer demand for Australian products instead of imported or foreign-owned brands would, they argue, stimulate manufacturing and profitability, create jobs and benefit the whole economy.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

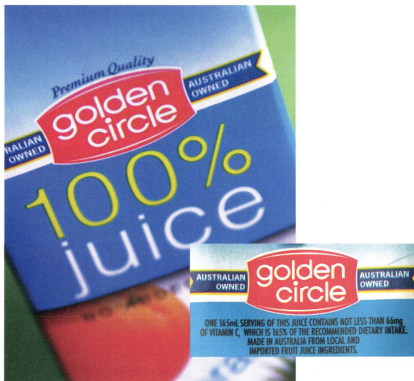
An alternative view favours global trade and international competition, arguing that measures like removing import tariffs encourage Australian manufacturers to become internationally competitive. They see buy Australian campaigns as backward and anti-competitive because they promote protection and tighter regulations for foreign investment or competition here.

They argue for direct foreign investment to boost economic growth, saying foreign-owned companies bring capital into the country, provide superior management, marketing and technological expertise and improve access to export markets. Open international trade and investment markets, they say, provide employment, reduce consumer costs, assist business development, and contribute to growth and higher living standards. Recent Commonwealth

What's happened to the dollar?



This graph demonstrates the recent decline in the value of the Australian dollar since the beginning of 2000, based on weekly figures. 'Buy Australian' campaigners say this is a symptom of our economic vulnerability.



Golden Circle is an Australian-owned company and many of its canned fruits carry the premium claim 'Product of Australia'. This fruit drink, though, says 'Made in Australia from local and imported ingredients'. That's a qualified claim under the Trade Practices Act. What exactly do both claims mean? See page 15.

Governments have usually taken this pro-global policy stance.

Governments claim they recognise community concerns about foreign ownership, but aim to balance such concerns against the strong economic benefits of foreign investment. The current government recently used powers under the *Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act, 1975*, to block the takeover of Woodside Petroleum by Shell, arguing the takeover was not in the national interest.

Don't believe the marketing blurb — check the fine print.

Produced and packed by
Talley's
Product of New Zealand



CHOICE'S VERDICT

There are flaws in the arguments both for and against buying Australian. Both the Australian-made and Australian-owned campaigns (see right for details) also have strengths and weaknesses. The economic rationale for all sides of the debate is extremely complex, and the upshot is that international economic forces are likely to have a stronger influence on Australia's economy than the way we fill our supermarket trolleys.

If you've decided you do want to buy Australian, unfortunately our current labelling laws and regulations don't make it easy for you. See pages 15–16 for an explanation of the various claims you'll come across and what they really mean, and check out *What you can do* on page 16. There are ways we can buy Australian if we want to, but our government is making it harder for us than it should.

And don't let the desire to buy Australian get in the way of normal shopping best practice — we want to ensure Australian firms produce quality products at competitive prices for us. So:

- **Consider the price:** look for Australian products that are competitive or are superior in some other way that's important to you.
- **Quality and durability are also important:** look for the Australian-made or owned brands that are competitive in those areas too.

DICK SMITH FOODS



Keen supporter of Australian-owned and made products, Dick Smith, launched Dick Smith Foods without doing any proper market research.

"I was personally concerned and I was told it would flop," he says. "It was Vegemite that originally got me going on the idea."

"Vegemite is owned by the American tobacco giant, Philip Morris. I found it difficult to

accept that the company that was the leading seller of cigarettes owned Vegemite. So I wrote to Philip Morris and said I wanted to buy Vegemite back. They wrote back and said, 'We don't sell our icon brands'."

This situation inspired Dick Smith's decision to choose food products that are in direct competition with brands that have a huge percentage of foreign ownership.

He was originally going to manufacture his own food, until existing Australian manufacturers told him they didn't have the marketing

clout to compete with bigger brands. As a result, all Dick Smith products are supplied by Australian-owned manufacturers.

In the early days it looked as though some supermarkets weren't going to give Dick Smith Foods shelf space.

"So I got on radio and said I'd get volunteers to sell the products at stalls outside the supermarket doors. By the time I got back to the office, my phone was ringing with supermarkets offering to take our products."

Dick Smith isn't sure of the long-term viability of Dick Smith Foods, but believes the project has "made a statement" and given many small Australian-owned suppliers a much higher profile for their Australian-owned and made brands.

"Dick Smith Foods is part of the protest and that's why many consumers are backing it," he says.



How to be a good Aussie shopper

If you think it's worth buying Australian and want to be a 'true-blue' shopper, what's the difference between Australian-made and Australian-owned? What do the different labels you see really mean? And what can you do, at the end of the day, to be a good Aussie shopper?

AUSTRALIAN-MADE

The Australian Made Campaign Limited is a not-for-profit organisation set up by the 11 national and state Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

■ **The philosophy:** Every Australian can play a part in helping our industries to prosper by buying Australian-made products. You'll help to promote job creation and industry development as a result.

The campaign claims to have no vested interest other than promoting Australian industry development and a buy Australian culture. All money raised is reinvested in marketing.

■ **How it works:** The campaign's trademark is the green and gold kangaroo (above right), which is a Commonwealth-owned certification trademark. Any products that meet the Trade Practices Act country of origin labelling guidelines for a 'made in Australia' claim can use the logo. Currently the logo isn't used with the more stringent 'Product of Australia' claim (see *What the labels really mean*, page 15).

Manufacturers have to pay to use the trademark. The cost depends on their turnover and can vary from \$200 to \$20,000 per year. Companies are self-certified — the manufacturer completes an application form and certifies that their claims meet the Trade Practices Act — but there's a random audit process.

The campaign makes no judgment about company ownership. It sees the inherent value of a company to Australia as where and how it invests: sourcing inputs here, providing jobs, undertaking research and development, investing in training, value-adding to other Australian businesses. Campaign patron, Tim Fischer, says it would equally welcome a foreign-owned company like McDonalds that uses Australian produce and trains employees as it would Smorgon Steel, a family-owned Australian business that employs over 7000 people.

■ **Issues:** The Australian Made Campaign allows Australian-owned companies to make a claim about their ownership when they use the campaign's trademark, provided the claim is correct. For example, Cedel hair care products use the Australian Made Campaign logo with the label 'Australian made and owned'.

However, Australian Made Campaign executive director, Jenny Da Rin, says there's no certainty for consumers about what 'Australian-owned' actually means and who regulates that.

"One of the worries I have is that there's a perception that a company that is Australian-owned is manufacturing in Australia, and that's not necessarily the case," she says.

How does she answer the criticism that the campaign's dominated by foreign-owned companies? Da Rin says 90% of the licence holders are in fact Australian-owned companies.

■ **More information:** *Buying Australian Made*, the official guide, lists over 3000 Australian-made products; to obtain a copy, go to www.australianmade.com.au, write to PO Box E14, Kingston 2604, or call 1800 350 520.

AUSTRALIAN-OWNED

The Australian Companies Institute is a non-profit organisation that aims to create awareness about the "sell-off of Australian icons and brands to overseas interests". Its *Ausbuy Guide* lists Australian-owned brands next to their foreign-owned competitors for a variety of products and services, including baby products, desserts, canned fruit, sauces, whitegoods, hotels and motels, travel and funerals.

Most of the products listed are also Australian-made. If a product isn't substantially made in Australia, the guide tries to note that fact where possible, but there is a chance imported products are included in it.

■ **The philosophy:** Most supporters of Australian ownership are opposed to foreign companies taking over successful Australian companies. They give examples of foreign companies buying viable Australian-owned businesses, 'downsizing' their staff, increasing prices and paying much less tax than Australian-owned companies.

They also say they're concerned about the unchecked growth of multinational companies through mergers and acquisitions.

They argue that if you buy products from an Australian-owned company, the profits and wealth created will stay in Australia and be used to employ Australians.

Ausbuy contends that our labelling laws are inadequate and not policed, and laments what it sees as the end of Australian government protection for local producers in favour of opening up our markets to international competition.

The *Ausbuy Guide* says that who owns our companies, resources and real estate should be a major concern to every Australian.

"Neither the government nor the Labor opposition has any idea what Australia will do to maintain our standard of living when we've sold all our major companies and resources. We can't rely on our politicians to keep Australia Australian-owned, so we



CHOICE thinks this Commonwealth-owned certification mark should be used to identify goods that meet the very stringent requirements of 'Product of Australia'. It's currently only used to describe goods 'Made in Australia', and that means they can be made from imported ingredients or even partly manufactured overseas. That's not good enough and only serves to confuse consumers who are seeking out Australian products.

RUGGED EARTH



Walter Glaser, director of Rugged Earth clothing company, joined the Australian Made Campaign to give his business a competitive advantage.

Rugged Earth oilskin coats are made from imported fabric, but it's dyed and coated in Australia, and the coats are cut and assembled here.

"When you look at the value-adding on the fabric and the labour costs involved with putting the coat together, it's definitely Australian-made," Walter says.

He says he sees examples of oilskin coats that he knows are imported from Fiji and India with "Made in Australia plastered all over them".

"But I'm not fazed by the import competition. My business has grown each year for the five years since it started. We export about 50% of what we make to the European market. The Australian Made Campaign gives us the market recognition we need to keep the factory going and keep our people employed," he says.



PHOTO: TIMOTHY

HERRON vs PANADOL

Herron Pharmaceuticals aired a series of ads beginning in February where it made a distinction between the Australian ownership of Herron and the foreign ownership of Panadol.

The ads described Herron as Australian-owned and Panadol as "foreign-owned". As part of its action against the Herron advertising campaign, SmithKline Beecham (SB), the maker of Panadol, took Herron to court to apply for an interim injunction under the Trade Practices Act.

SB alleged the ads were misleading. By claiming Herron was Australian-owned, SB argued, the ads led consumers to believe all Herron products were Australian-made, when one of the company's top-selling products, Capsels, was made under contract in the US.

Second, in alleging Panadol was "foreign-owned", it implied Panadol wasn't Australian-made, when Panadol is made in Australia.

In fact SB imports paracetamol in powder form, and so does Herron

have to change our buying habits to always give preference to: Australian-owned, Australian-made."

How it works: A company must be a member of the Australian Companies Institute before it can use the Ausbuy logo on its packaging (see below). Members are screened and must provide references before they're accepted.

How is 'Australian-owned company' defined? The Australian owners must have a 'controlling interest': a company has to be 75% Australian-owned to use the Ausbuy logo.

There's nothing to stop other companies from describing their products as Australian-made and owned. However, Ausbuy says if they don't use the official logo, it's difficult for consumers to verify their claims.

The Ausbuy Guide is available in Woolworths supermarkets.

For more information contact the Australian Companies

Institute, Ausbuy, PO Box 589, Milsons Point 1565;

phone (02) 9954 6144;

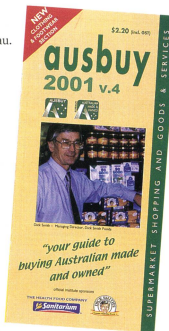
fax (02) 9954 6544;

go to www.ausbuy.com.au;

or email ausbuy@magna.com.au.



The 'Australian made and owned' logo is a way to identify Australian-owned companies, but there's still a chance the product is partly manufactured overseas. The Ausbuy Guide can also help you to identify brands that are Australian-owned, but it may include imported products.



to make other products. Both companies then use local manufacturing processes to turn the powdered paracetamol into their products.

The judge found that SB's case was "a weak one" and refused to grant the injunction. He didn't place any weight on a phone survey conducted by SB, concluding that the ad did "not convey any particular message as to where or by whom particular Herron products are manufactured or made... I do not think that the advertisement conveys any more than that the products are the same, and the Australian-owned product should be preferred to the foreign-owned product. Buy from an Australian, rather than from a foreigner, is the essential thrust of the message."

The case was reported as an attempt by SB to stop Herron from promoting itself as Australian-owned, but SB's main complaint was with the ad's potential to mislead consumers about the actual manufacture of the two companies' products.

What the labels really mean

Australia has country of origin labelling laws that ought to help consumers identify Australian-manufactured products. The country of origin provisions of the Trade Practices Act are supposedly designed to prevent manufacturers from making false claims about where their products are made.

How exactly do our country of origin labelling laws work and are they really useful — and usable — for consumers?

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

According to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), a country of origin claim is any labelling, packaging, logo or advertising that makes a statement, claim or implication about which country a product comes from.

Unfortunately, the law isn't mandatory and it's not prescriptive. With the exception of processed food (see *Food labelling*, page 16), manufacturers don't have to state where the product is made; but if they do make a claim, it has to be correct.

Rules introduced in 1998 clarified what manufacturers should do to comply with the Trade Practices Act. They establish a set of criteria or tests that goods have to pass before they can make certain country of origin labelling claims. And that's where the consumer confusion starts.

FUZZY CLAIMS

Many consumers still think the best labelling claim to look for is 'Made in Australia'. But it, 'Made in ...' and 'Manufactured in ...' aren't in fact as strong as the claim

'Product of Australia' (see *The premium claim*, below).

A label that says 'Made in Australia' tells you that:

- The product must have been "substantially transformed" in Australia, and
- 50% or more of the costs of production must have been incurred here.

The meaning of "substantial transformation" hasn't been tested in court, but the ACCC has made certain determinations about its meaning.

For example, a health products company wanted to use the claim 'Made in Australia' on its cod liver oil products. The cod was a northern hemisphere fish; the oil was manufactured in the UK. It was shipped to Australia in bulk and either bottled or soft-gel encapsulated here.

The ACCC initially said the manufacturer couldn't use the claim. Then it decided the process of soft-gel encapsulation satisfied the "substantial transformation" test. The company's cod liver oil capsules can now carry the label 'Made in Australia'. However, they can't use the claim if they simply bottle liquid cod liver oil in Australia.

To satisfy the cost of production test for the 'Made in Australia' claim, the 50% must come from the cost of materials, labour and overheads.

THE PREMIUM CLAIM

'Product of Australia' is now the premium country of origin labelling claim. A label that says 'Product of Australia' tells you the product has met two rigorous criteria:

- Each significant component (or ingredient) must originate from Australia.
- All or most of the production processes must take place here.

Again, the meaning of the two criteria hasn't been tested in court but the ACCC has been asked to give its view. For example, the textiles, clothing and footwear industry asked the ACCC to rule on whether fabric dye was a "significant component". It advised that if the dye was imported, the product would have to carry the lesser claim of 'Made in Australia'.

QUALIFIED CLAIMS

If a manufacturer makes the qualified claim 'Made in Australia from imported and Australian ingredients', it means the imported content of the product is greater than the local content. If the label says 'from local and imported ingredients', the local content is greater.

And you can't be sure of the meaning of claims like 'built in' or 'assembled in'. The ACCC says they'll be assessed individually on their merits.



Spot the REAL Aussie paracetamol. Is it the one that's manufactured here but owned by a foreign company or the one that's manufactured overseas by an Australian-owned company?

The matter has been listed for a full hearing in June. If it goes ahead, it's a case that might test the whole notion of "substantial transformation" of products (see above right), and could clarify the whole issue of 'Made in Australia' claims for industry and consumers.

WHAT ABOUT ENFORCEMENT?

The ACCC's been concentrating on prevention rather than enforcement, working with key industry sectors to ensure they comply with the country of origin provisions of the Trade Practices Act. Working parties have been developing guidelines for the following industry sectors:

- Complementary healthcare.
- Textiles, clothing and footwear.
- Whitegoods and electrical.
- Furniture and furnishings.
- Food and beverages.
- Toys.

The working parties visit manufacturing plants, look at processes and help the industry sector to understand what it has to do to meet the criteria for using the different country of origin labelling claims. When each working party completes its work, the industry sector is given time to get its labelling in order and then the ACCC conducts sampling to check compliance.

The ACCC also has a range of consumer education publications available and good country of origin information on its website (www.accc.gov.au).

Despite this, our labelling laws currently make it too easy for manufacturers to withhold information from consumers — even to be outright deceptive. The TPA tests for country of origin claims — particularly for the 'Made in Australia' claim — are weak. It can give consumers information that's so vague it makes informed choice impossible. More needs to be done to raise consumer awareness about the fact that country of origin laws aren't mandatory, except for processed food. There also needs to be more education about the difference between 'Made in Australia' and 'Product of Australia'.

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

In summary, if you want to buy Australian:

- Seek out labels with the 'Product of Australia' claim. Some components or ingredients may still originate from overseas and some of the manufacturing processes may happen there. But this claim is the closest Australian consumers have to the genuine article.
- Be sceptical of labels and packaging with lots of Australian symbols (koalas, swagmen by their billabongs, the flag). You'll often find another country of origin hidden somewhere on the packaging.
- Consult sources like the *Ausbyy Guide* and the Australian Made Campaign's official guide to buying Australian-made (see pages 13–14 for details).
- The ACCC has some useful resources on its website that can help you to understand what the different labels really mean (www.accc.gov.au).
- If you find a product that you think is bogus, tell the ACCC and organisations like Ausbyy and the Australian Made Campaign.
- However, don't let the arguments for buying Australian cloud your consumer judgment: always consider price and quality, not just country of origin.



Kraft is a foreign-owned company and yet it makes a point of advertising that the peanuts in its peanut butter are 100% grown in Queensland on Australian-owned farms. It's up to you to make a value judgment about whether it's more important that a product's made here or that the company is controlled by Australian shareholders.

FOOD LABELLING: CONFUSION REIGNS

Food labels must identify the country in which the food was made or produced. This is a mandatory requirement of the Food Standards Code (FSC), independent of the Trade Practices Act country of origin requirements.

The words "made or produced" aren't defined in the FSC as they are in the Trade Practices Act.

CHOICE thinks it's possible that a food manufacturer could use the labelling claim 'Made in Australia' and comply with the requirements of the FSC without complying with the country of origin provisions of the Act. We'd like to think manufacturers understand the difference and comply with both, but there's too much room for confusion.

It's absurd that the labelling requirements for the FSC aren't consistent with the country of origin provisions of the Trade Practices Act. This lack of consistency makes it almost impossible for consumers to make informed choices. It should be addressed by both the policymakers and regulators.

WE KNOW YOU CARE

We were overwhelmed by the interest in buying Australian expressed by CHOICE subscribers when we last surveyed your interest in certain areas and topics. A huge 93% of you said you were very or somewhat interested. This was higher than the level of interest shown for any other topic in the survey.

We also know that many consumers do make a conscious effort to buy Australian. Research by the Australian Made Campaign has indicated 80% of consumers seek out Australian products and 30% will always buy Australian-made.

We think this level of interest and support means consumers deserve clearer, more accurate and truthful label information.

TOOTHPASTE

What's in it, and how do we like it to taste and feel in our mouth? Here's our trialists' verdict.



IN A NUTSHELL

- *Best-liked overall:* COLGATE Total Gel.
- *Least-liked overall:* THURSDAY PLANTATION Tea Tree Fluoride-free and IPANA Regular.
- *Best-liked for taste:* AIM Minty Gel.
- *Best-liked type:* gel, or paste with stripes.
- *Best value for money in the top dozen:* AIM Minty Gel.

Most of us use it twice a day and collectively we spend almost \$200 million on it each year in grocery shops alone. So perhaps it's no surprise there are so many toothpastes on the market. We asked 500+ CHOICE Home Testers to trial 42 different ones, all widely available for less than \$10 per tube.

The majority were pastes, about a quarter gels and four pastes with stripes (usually a mixture of paste and gel). Excluded were special toothpastes, such as for children, sensitive teeth or dentures.

The CHOICE Home Testers told us which ones taste best and leave your mouth feeling freshest, so you don't need to keep trying one after the other yourself. Based on brushing twice a day, the results below are based on over 20,000 tooth-brushings.

WHAT'S HOT ... AND WHAT'S NOT

Refreshing, minty, sweet and smooth — if that's what a toothpaste tasted and felt like in their mouths, it was most likely to get our trialists' thumbs-up.

On the whole, traditional **pastes** scored lower — they were thought to taste less minty than **gels** and **stripy** ones, which were liked best for taste. Five of the six top brands for taste were gels, the sixth a paste with stripes. Gels were found less powdery and to taste refreshing, minty and sweet; stripy pastes were minty and smooth.

FLUORIDE AND OTHER ADDITIVES

- All the **fluoride-free** toothpastes in the trial were comparatively unpopular, and were considered less minty, more artificial and stronger in taste. For more on fluoride, see *What's in toothpaste?*, page 18.
- Three toothpastes in the trial contained **baking soda** (sodium bicarbonate). It's a mild abrasive added to remove plaque, but becomes less effective when wet. Our trialists generally disliked these (two were pastes, one was a gel), which they described as being powdery and gritty, and tasting soapy, more artificial and chalkier than those without it. Quite a few also mentioned they weren't frothy enough.
- On the other hand, the two toothpastes marketed for **tartar control** scored quite high in the ratings. Some manufacturers add pyrophosphates, diphosphonates and zinc compounds to their products to help slow the build-up of new tartar above the gum line.
- The trialists liked some of the **whitening** toothpastes for their minty and peppery taste, but thought they were generally more gritty than others. Whitening agents are added to help remove stains on teeth from smoking and drinking lots of tea or coffee. Some manufacturers use similar agents to those used in tartar-control toothpastes, while COLGATE Sensation Baking Soda & Peroxide contains calcium peroxide.
- None of the toothpastes in the trial contains hydrogen peroxide, which is added to some smokers' whitening toothpastes to bleach away stains. Fears about long-term use of hydrogen peroxide include its potential to damage gums and the interior of teeth.

THE TOP DOZEN

These toothpastes scored significantly higher overall than average. Two thirds of these are COLGATE, which reflects this brand's dominance (60%) in the toothpaste market. PEARL DROPS, AIM and MACLEANS brands, on the other hand, hold 2%, 3% and 19% of market share respectively.

	AVERAGE PRICE PER 100 g
COLGATE Total Gel	\$2.36
PEARL DROPS Arctic Mint Gel Whitening	\$4.54
AIM Minty Gel	\$1.67
COLGATE Sensation Whitening	\$3.22
MACLEANS Triple Stripe Mildmint	\$1.81
COLGATE Fluoriguard Triple Cool Stripe	\$2.15
MACLEANS Complete Care Freshmint	\$1.74
COLGATE Fresh Confidence Gel	\$3.27
COLGATE Fluoriguard Blue Minty Gel	\$1.99
COLGATE Sensation Whitening plus Tartar Control	\$3.24
COLGATE Total Fresh Stripe	\$2.34
COLGATE Tartar Control	\$2.10

What's in toothpaste?

The exact composition of a toothpaste varies from brand to brand. It usually contains a cleaning and polishing agent or abrasive (10–40%), humectant (moisturising agent: 20–70%), water (5–30%), binding agent (1–2%), detergent (1–3%), flavour and colour (1–2%), preservative (0.05–0.5%) and active ingredients (like fluoride) or special-purpose additives (0.1–0.5%).

■ **Cleaning and polishing agents (abrasives)** help scour away plaque and stains from the tooth enamel. Gel toothpaste contains abrasives too, even though you can't see them in the clear gel. That's because the refractive index (the measure of a substance's ability to bend light) of the abrasive particles is about the same as that of the medium they're carried in. Common polishing agents include calcium carbonate, dicalcium phosphate dihydrate (DCP), silica, hydrated silica, aluminium hydroxide, and a variety of phosphates of sodium and calcium.

■ **Humectants (moisturising agents)** prevent the toothpaste from drying out if, say, you forget to put the cap back on. They also preserve the flavour and retain the amount of available fluoride. The most commonly used are sorbitol and glycerine (which also both function as sweeteners) and propylene glycol (PEG).

■ **Binding (or suspension) agents** stop the solid and liquid ingredients from separating. The

most common are cellulose gum, carrageenan (Irish moss extract) and synthetic celluloses.

■ **Detergents** help loosen plaque deposits so they can be brushed away, and help create foam. Sodium lauryl sulfate is the most commonly used detergent.

■ **Flavours and sweeteners** make the toothpaste palatable and **preservatives** prevent bacteria from growing in the moist medium. All the toothpastes trialled contain these substances, as well as **water**. Methyl paraben, alcohol and benzoates are the most commonly used preservatives, and saccharin is the most common sweetener (sugars are prohibited in toothpaste). Commonly used flavours are peppermint, spearmint and wintergreen, which are often combined with other essential oils.

ACTIVE INGREDIENTS

Fluoride is the most commonly used therapeutic agent in toothpaste. It strengthens the tooth enamel and protects it from the damage caused by bacteria in plaque. While fluoridated toothpaste has greatly contributed to a reduction in dental decay, there's still debate over possible side effects, especially of water fluoridation. For more information on this topic, see our article in the August 1997 issue of CHOICE, or phone for a free back copy if you're a CHOICE subscriber.

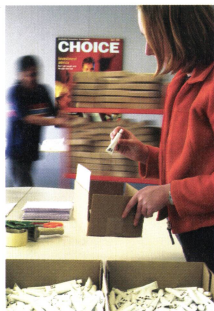
But as far as toothpaste is concerned, the benefits of fluoride far outweigh possible side effects. Only for young children, who're likely to swallow some toothpaste while brushing, can it be a problem. It's estimated that children swallow about one third of the toothpaste on their brush, and that more than half the fluoride intake of a two-year-old comes from toothpaste.

Getting too much fluoride as the teeth are forming below the gums can cause mottled tooth enamel (dental fluorosis). The effect can vary from small opaque or white flecks or lines on the teeth to more severe pitting, brittleness and brown staining. So use only a pea-sized amount of a low-fluoride toothpaste for young children, and supervise or help them with brushing until you're confident they spit it all out.

Most of the toothpastes trialled contain fluoride: sodium monofluorophosphate, sodium fluoride or stannous fluoride. Only four are fluoride-free, as indicated in their names.

■ Five fluoride toothpastes (the **MACLEANS Complete Care** and **COLGATE Total** products) contain triclosan, an antibacterial agent that's used extensively in deodorants, soaps and other dermatological preparations. In toothpaste it's effective in reducing plaque formation and gingivitis (inflammation and bleeding of the gums).

OUR TRIAL



Our thanks go to the hundreds of CHOICE Home Testers (516, to be precise) who took particular care with their

tooth-brushing routines for a few weeks. Each home tester trialled seven toothpastes for three days each and then completed a questionnaire, telling us what they thought about each product's taste, freshness, frothiness and feel in the mouth, and gave an overall rating. Each brand was tested by around 60 trialists.

Being a CHOICE researcher can sometimes involve some rather strange jobs, such as squeezing toothpaste out of one tube into another (unmarked) one, in order to disguise the toothpastes' brand names for our trialists.



toothpaste

Brand (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	Type	Manufacturer / distributor	Average price (\$/100 g) *
COLGATE Total Gel	77	Gel	Colgate-Palmolive	2.36
PEARL DROPS Arctic Mint Gel Whitening	75	Gel, whitening	Carter Wallace	4.54
AIM Minty Gel	74	Gel	Lever Rexona	1.67
COLGATE Sensation Whitening	74	Paste, whitening	Colgate-Palmolive	3.22
MACLEANS Triple Stripe Mildmint	74	Stripe	SmithKline Beecham	1.81
COLGATE Fluoriguard Triple Cool Stripe	73	Stripe	Colgate-Palmolive	2.15
MACLEANS Complete Care Freshmint	73	Paste	SmithKline Beecham	1.74
COLGATE Fresh Confidence Gel	72	Gel	Colgate-Palmolive	3.27
COLGATE Fluoriguard Blue Minty Gel	71	Gel	Colgate-Palmolive	1.99
COLGATE Sensation Whitening plus Tartar Control	70	Paste, whitening, tartar control	Colgate-Palmolive	3.24
COLGATE Total Fresh Stripe	70	Stripe	Colgate-Palmolive	2.34
COLGATE Tartar Control	70	Paste, tartar control	Colgate-Palmolive	2.10
COLGATE Fluoriguard Great Regular Flavour	69	Paste	Colgate-Palmolive	1.93
COLGATE Total Fluoride	68	Paste	Colgate-Palmolive	2.33
ORAL-B Tooth and Gum Care Dental Paste	68	Paste	Oral B Laboratories	2.48
CEDEL Coolmint	67	Paste	Cedel Products	1.70
COLGATE Fluoriguard Cool Mint	67	Paste	Colgate-Palmolive	1.86
PEARL DROPS Coolmint Whitening	67	Paste, whitening	Carter Wallace	4.55
CLOSE UP Fluoride Mint Green Gel and Mouthwash in one	66	Gel	Lever Rexona	2.34
MACLEANS Complete Care Mildmint	66	Paste	SmithKline Beecham	1.74
CEDEL Spearmint	64	Paste	Cedel Products	1.66
CLOSE UP Fluoride Gel & Red Mouthwash in one	64	Gel	Lever Rexona	1.83
ULTRABRITE Non-fluoride	63	Paste, fluoride-free	Colgate-Palmolive	1.77
PEARL DROPS Freshmint Whitening	63	Paste, whitening	Carter Wallace	4.52
MACLEANS Whitening Gel Stripe	62	Stripe, whitening	SmithKline Beecham	3.10
NO FRILLS Cool Mint Gel	62	Gel	Franklins	0.67
NO FRILLS Regular	62	Paste	Franklins	0.61
CEDEL Mintmild	61	Paste	Cedel Products	1.65
MACLEANS Whitening	61	Paste, whitening	SmithKline Beecham	3.12
RED SEAL Herbal Fresh Fluoride-free	61	Paste, fluoride-free, herbal	Ancient Distributors	2.78
DENTAGARD Natural Herbal Flavoured	60	Paste, fluoride-free, herbal	Colgate-Palmolive	1.91
AIM Freshmint	59	Paste	Lever Rexona	1.65
COLGATE Sensation Baking Soda & Peroxide	58	Gel, baking soda	Colgate-Palmolive	3.17
MACLEANS Baking Soda	58	Paste, baking soda	SmithKline Beecham	2.45
AIM Original flavour	57	Paste	Lever Rexona	1.63
CEDEL Whitening with Delbrite	56	Paste, whitening	Cedel Products	2.65
SAVINGS Spearmint	56	Paste	Grocery Holdings	0.71
HOME BRAND Cool Mint Gel	54	Gel	Grocery Wholesalers	0.76
COLGATE Baking Soda Natural Mint Flavour	53	Paste, baking soda	Colgate-Palmolive	2.65
HOME BRAND Fluoride	53	Paste	Grocery Wholesalers	0.74
IPANA Regular	49	Paste	Riley Williams	1.27
THURSDAY PLANTATION Tea Tree Fluoride-free	46	Paste, fluoride-free	Thursday Plantation	3.78

1 Overall score
 Trialists gave an overall rating out of five, which we converted to a percentage score. Trialists considered taste, freshness, frothiness and feel in the mouth and then gave the overall rating.

* Prices shown are based on nationwide checks in January 2001, converted to a unit price for 100 g.

UPDATE: Health insurance

Did you 'run for cover' this time last year? Take stock and use our latest Best Buys to review your health insurance cover.

Since we last reported on health insurance, lifetime health cover has been introduced, punishing people who take out hospital cover after the age of 30 with higher premiums.

Because of this and a number of other government initiatives (such as the *Medicare levy surcharge*; see page 23), some people may only be interested in having a cheap policy that gets them into lifetime cover at an early age and exempt from the surcharge. We've taken this into account by listing not just our Best Buys, but also the cheapest policies you can get that fulfil these criteria. So this time we give you two options (see below):

■ Our **Best Buys** for hospital and ancillary cover: chosen for their competitive price from the best policies we found.

■ The **cheapest hospital cover** available — while these policies are far from the best available, they may suit you if you only want hospital cover to use the government incentives.

All premiums listed are annual costs for a family before the 30% government rebate. They're the base-rate premium; no age loading is included. Single premiums are usually half the family premium, while couples and single parents pay the same as families with most funds.

For more information about lifetime health cover, contact the Health Information Line on 1800 676 296.

HOSPITAL

BEST BUYS

All our Best Buys provide broad standard cover and don't exclude any treatments. All of them scored at least 85% in our policy ratings (the score's shown in brackets) and have a competitive price. However, sometimes certain benefits are limited for a set period — up to the first three years of membership. (See *How we scored*, page 23, for an explanation of the criteria used.)

Unfortunately, some of the Best Buys are only available to a restricted membership: check *Company contact and membership details*, page 23, to see if you're eligible. For each state we've picked at least one policy that's available to everyone.

We've given the Best Buys without an excess or co-payment. However, all of them offer a cheaper premium if you're prepared to have one or the other.

ACT/NSW

■ IOR HEALTH 100% National Hospital: \$1535.70 (91%).

■ GMF Health Gold Cover: \$1287.50 (87%).

NORTHERN TERRITORY

■ TEACHERS HEALTH SOCIETY (NSW) Top Private Hospital Cover (if eligible): \$1480.96 (93%).

■ IOR HEALTH 100% National Hospital: \$1402.60 (91%).

■ AXA Hospital Cover: \$1423.20 (88%).

■ GMF Health Gold Cover: \$1287.50 (87%).

■ MEDIBANK PRIVATE Blue Ribbon Hospital: \$1232.90 (86%).

QUEENSLAND

■ NAVY HEALTH Top Hospital (if eligible): \$1659.91 (93%).

■ IOR HEALTH 100% National Hospital: \$1560.00 (91%).

■ GMF Health Gold Cover: \$1287.50 (87%).

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

■ NAVY HEALTH Top Hospital (if eligible): \$1659.91 (93%).

■ IOR HEALTH 100% National Hospital: \$1612.50 (91%).

■ GMF Health Gold Cover: \$1287.50 (87%).

TASMANIA

■ TEACHERS HEALTH SOCIETY (NSW) Top Private Hospital Cover (if eligible): \$1480.96 (93%).

■ GMF Health Gold Cover: \$1287.50 (87%).

VICTORIA

■ NAVY HEALTH Top Hospital (if eligible): \$1659.91 (93%).

■ GMF Health Gold Cover: \$1287.50 (87%).

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

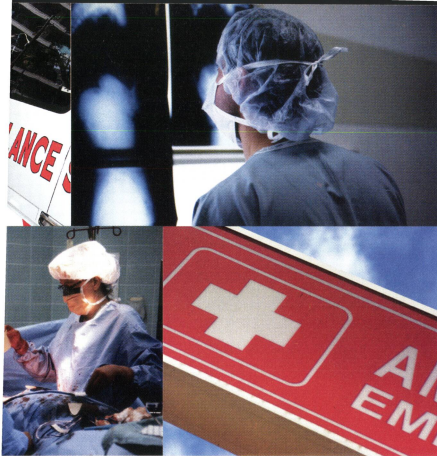
■ TEACHERS HEALTH SOCIETY (NSW) Top Private Hospital Cover (if eligible): \$1480.96 (93%).

■ IOR HEALTH 100% National Hospital: \$1402.60 (91%).

■ GMF Health Gold Cover: \$1287.50 (87%).

■ GMMBA 100% Hospital Cover: \$1389.05 (86%).





VANESSA MARSHALL/PHOTODISC

IN A NUTSHELL

- 176 hospital policies with over 1400 different premium options (with or without an excess or co-payment) and 298 ancillary policies: we surveyed them all to come up with Best Buys to suit your needs and budget.
- For a hospital and an ancillary insurance database that will find policies to fit your individual preferences, go to www.choice.com.au and type 'guide to choosing private health insurance' in the search box.

EXCESSES AND CO-PAYMENTS

- You can agree to pay an **excess** when you claim on your policy in return for a lower premium. Check how often the excess is applied per person and per membership each year.
- Another way to get a lower premium is to opt for a **co-payment**: you pay a certain amount each day you're in hospital, usually up to a set limit per stay or per year.

See *Hospital: Cheapest policies available*, below, for more.

CHEAPEST POLICIES AVAILABLE

These are the cheapest cover options in each state, listed regardless of their score. Be aware that all of them provide only limited cover. For some treatments — often obstetrics and assisted reproduction but sometimes other treatments such as coronary surgery or hip/knee replacement — benefits may be limited to treatment in a public hospital, or some benefits totally excluded. Check with the funds for details.

If you use your policy, you may have to pay an excess and/or a co-payment. We've listed those; where you see 1/2 as the number of times the excess applies, this means it would apply once per person and twice per membership, per year. So if two people covered by family membership claimed in the same year, it would apply to each of them; if a third person claimed, it wouldn't apply again.

ACT/NSW

- **MEDIBANK PRIVATE First Choice Saver**: \$515.50 (\$1000 excess, \$50–\$80 co-payment). Number of times excess applies: 1. Co-payment capped? \$280 per stay, no annual cap. (56%)
- **HCF Hospital Top Plus Cover Advanced Savings Option**: \$624 (\$100 co-payment). Co-payment capped? \$800 per year. (71%)

NORTHERN TERRITORY

- **MEDIBANK PRIVATE First Choice Saver**: \$357.80 (\$1000 excess, \$50–\$80 co-payment). Number of times excess applies: 1. Co-payment capped? \$280 per stay, no annual cap. (56%)
- **MBF Select Hospital Fio**: \$406.66 (\$500 excess, \$50 co-payment). Number of times excess applies: 1/2. Co-payment capped? \$250 per stay, no annual cap. (77%)

QUEENSLAND

- **HCF Hospital Top Plus Cover Advanced Savings Option**: \$738.40 (\$100 co-payment). Co-payment capped? \$800 per year. (71%)

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

- **HCF Hospital Top Plus Cover Advanced Savings Option**: \$785.20 (\$100 co-payment). Co-payment capped? \$800 per year. (71%)
- **IOR Lifestyle Hospital**: \$785.30 (\$250 excess). Number of times excess applies: 1/2. (53%)

TASMANIA

- **HCF Hospital Top Plus Cover Advanced Savings Option**: \$681.20 (\$100 co-payment). Co-payment capped? \$800 per year. (71%)

VICTORIA

- **HCF Hospital Top Plus Cover Advanced Savings Option**: \$826.80 (\$100 co-payment). Co-payment capped? \$800 per year. (71%)
- **MEDIBANK PRIVATE First Choice Saver**: \$857.30 (\$1000 excess, \$50–\$80 co-payment). Number of times excess applies: 1. Co-payment capped? \$280 per stay, no annual cap. (56%)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

- **HCF Hospital Top Plus Cover Advanced Savings Option**: \$447.20 (\$100 co-payment). Co-payment capped? \$800 per year. (71%)

ANCILLARY: BEST BUYS

There are no complex government policies affecting ancillary health insurance, so these Best Buys look at value for money. While quite a few hospital policies received very high scores, the ancillary policies didn't fare as well.

Most of them cover only part of the costs you'll actually be charged. Some quote cover as a percentage, such as 60%. If you decide on one of those policies, check whether it covers 60% of your costs or only 60% of a charge the fund has decided is adequate for the procedure, which may be less than you pay.

The Best Buys are policies with a score of at least 65% and a competitive price. As with hospital cover, we've included restricted-membership as well as open funds.

Dental and optical are typically the most used services, so we've given separate scores for them.

For more information see *How we scored*, right.

ACT/NSW

- **HEALTH PARTNERS Country Gold Extras:** \$770.60. Dental: 73%. Optical: 57%. Overall: 77%.
- **IOR HEALTH 70%:** \$656.50. Dental: 74%. Optical: 47%. Overall: 67%.
- **ST LUKE'S Extras:** \$675.00. Dental: 68%. Optical: 75%. Overall: 67%.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

- **CBHS Top Extras** (if eligible): \$842.40. Dental: 88%. Optical: 88%. Overall: 90%.
- **HEALTH PARTNERS Country Gold Extras:** \$770.60. Dental: 73%. Optical: 57%. Overall: 77%.
- **IOR HEALTH 70%:** \$710.60. Dental: 74%. Optical: 47%. Overall: 67%.
- **ST LUKE'S Extras:** \$675.00. Dental: 68%. Optical: 75%. Overall: 67%.

QUEENSLAND

- **CBHS Top Extras** (if eligible): \$842.40. Dental: 88%. Optical: 88%. Overall: 90%.
- **HEALTH PARTNERS Country Gold Extras:** \$770.60. Dental: 73%. Optical: 57%. Overall: 77%.
- **IOR HEALTH 70%:** \$682.40. Dental: 74%. Optical: 47%. Overall: 67%.
- **ST LUKE'S Extras:** \$675.00. Dental: 68%. Optical: 75%. Overall: 67%.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

- **IOR HEALTH 70%:** \$547.10. Dental: 74%. Optical: 52%. Overall: 68%.

TASMANIA

- **CBHS Top Extras** (if eligible): \$842.40. Dental: 88%. Optical: 88%. Overall: 90%.
- **HEALTH PARTNERS Country Gold Extras:** \$770.60. Dental: 73%. Optical: 57%. Overall: 77%.
- **MEDIBANK PRIVATE Blue Ribbon Extras Plus:** \$781.70. Dental: 71%. Optical: 64%. Overall: 68%.
- **IOR HEALTH 70%:** \$731.20. Dental: 74%. Optical: 47%. Overall: 67%.
- **ST LUKE'S Extras:** \$675.00. Dental: 68%. Optical: 75%. Overall: 67%.

VICTORIA

- **CBHS Top Extras** (if eligible): \$842.40. Dental: 88%. Optical: 88%. Overall: 90%.
- **HEALTH PARTNERS Country Gold Extras:** \$770.60. Dental: 73%. Optical: 57%. Overall: 77%.
- **IOR HEALTH 70%:** \$731.20. Dental: 74%. Optical: 47%. Overall: 67%.
- **ST LUKE'S Extras:** \$675.00. Dental: 68%. Optical: 75%. Overall: 67%.

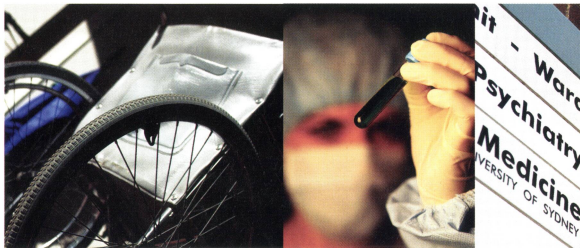
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

- **CBHS Top Extras** (if eligible): \$842.40. Dental: 88%. Optical: 88%. Overall: 90%.
- **HEALTH PARTNERS Country Gold Extras:** \$770.60. Dental: 73%. Optical: 57%. Overall: 77%.
- **IOR HEALTH 70%:** \$710.60. Dental: 74%. Optical: 47%. Overall: 67%.
- **ST LUKE'S Extras:** \$675.00. Dental: 68%. Optical: 75%. Overall: 67%.
- **HIF Super Options:** \$728.85. Dental: 68%. Optical: 68%. Overall: 65%.

WHAT ABOUT PUBLIC HOSPITAL COVER?

This survey doesn't include products that only cover you as a private patient in a shared ward in a public hospital (which means, essentially, that you get to choose your doctor in a public hospital).

If it interests you as a cheaper option, call some funds in your state and shop around for a good price.



HOW WE SCORED

Our survey included open and restricted-membership funds with more than 10,000 members.

Some funds declined to give us information, or couldn't because they're altering their plans. They are: **HBf, LATROBE, MILDURA DISTRICT HOSPITAL FUND, TEACHERS UNION HEALTH (QLD), R&T HEALTH FUND, WESTFUND.** Thank you to the other funds for ensuring their information is correct. To contact them, see *Company contact and membership details*, right.

What's the private hospital cover score based on?

We looked at policies providing private hospital accommodation, including those that exclude or limit cover for various conditions. We scored each policy for the following:

- The level of cover available for 10 common procedures — including whether they're excluded or limited and the length of the waiting period.
- Where co-payments or excesses apply, how often they apply and whether you pay them in day and public hospitals.

What's the ancillary cover score based on?

Our assessment of ancillary policies is based on a score for the level of cover received for different services, and whether those services have combined limits. The different services have the following weightings:

- Dental (this is based on 65% general dental, 25% major dental and 10% orthodontics): 54%.
- Optical: 16%.
- Physiotherapy: 8%.
- Chiropractic/osteopathy: 7%.
- Pharmacy: 4%.
- Podiatry: 3%.
- Other services (acupuncture, natural therapy, speech therapy, psychology, fitness and health management aids like nebulisers, blood glucose monitors and hearing aids): 7%.

For the overall score, funds are also assessed for the highest repayment you'd receive for all the services we assessed.

COMPANY CONTACT AND MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

- **AUSTRALIAN UNITY:** 13 29 39, www.austunity.com.au.
- **AXA AUSTRALIA HEALTH INSURANCE:** 13 12 43, www.axa.com.au/health.
- **CBHS:** 1300 654 123, www.cbhs.com.au. You must be a past or current employee of the Commonwealth Bank (or affiliated company) or a dependant.
- **CREDICARE:** (07) 3365 0022, www.cua.com.au. You must be a member of Credit Union Australia.
- **DEFENCE HEALTH:** 1800 335 425, www.defencehealth.asn.au. It's available only to serving or ex-members of the Australian Defence Force or the ADF Reserve and their families, Department of Defence (DOD) civilians and their families, and employees of companies contracted to DOD and their families.
- **GMF HEALTH:** 1300 653 099, www.gmfhealth.com.au.
- **GMHBA:** 1800 032 336, www.gmhba.com.au.
- **GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES HEALTH FUND:** 1300 366 868, www.gehf.com.au. (Membership is open to all.)
- **GRAND UNITED:** 1800 800 245, www.grandunited.com.au.
- **HBA:** 13 12 43, www.hba.com.au.
- **HCF:** 13 14 39, www.hcf.com.au.
- **HEALTH PARTNERS:** (08) 8223 7588 or 1800 182 322, www.healthpartners.com.au.
- **HIF:** 1300 13 40 60, www.hif.com.au.
- **IOR:** 1800 005 662, www.ior.org.au/group.
- **MANCHESTER UNITY:** 13 13 72, www.manchesterunity.com.au.
- **MBF:** 13 26 23 new members, 13 11 37 existing members, www.mbf.com.au.
- **MEDIBANK PRIVATE:** 13 23 31 existing members, 1800 188 188 new members, www.medibank.com.au.
- **MUTUAL COMMUNITY:** 13 12 43, www.mutualcommunity.com.au.
- **NAVY HEALTH:** (03) 9899 3277 or 1800 333 156, www.navyhealth.com.au. It's available only to serving or ex-members of the Australian Defence Force and their families; and civilian employees of DOD and their families, and employees and families of civilian organisations contracted to provide services to DOD.
- **NIB:** 13 14 63, www.nib.com.au.
- **NRMA:** 13 32 34, www.nrma.com.au.
- **SGIC Health:** 13 32 34, www.sgic.com.au.
- **SGIO Health:** 13 32 34, www.sgio.com.au.
- **ST LUKE'S:** 1300 651 988, www.stlukes.com.au.
- **TEACHERS HEALTH SOCIETY (NSW):** 1300 728 188, www.teachershealth.com.au. Available to educational union members and their families.

MEDICARE LEVY SURCHARGE

The Medicare levy surcharge is an extra 1% tax payable by single people with an income above \$50,000 and by couples and families with a combined income above \$100,000 (the income threshold for families increases by \$1500 for each child after the first).

If you take out hospital insurance you can get an exemption from the surcharge. However, some policies with a high excess (over \$500 for a single person and over \$1000 for a family) don't qualify for this exemption. So if you take out hospital insurance to avoid paying the surcharge, check with your health fund that your policy qualifies. As an example for a family policy, if your \$1000 excess is to be paid twice in one year, the policy doesn't qualify for the exemption.

MORE INFORMATION

As well as our *Interactive health insurance selector* (see in a nutshell, page 21), www.choice.com.au has advice on what to consider when choosing a policy. If you don't have Internet access, look at *CHOICE*, November 1999 or August 1998, for previous articles or ring Consumer Services on (02) 9577 3333 to get a copy of the online article.

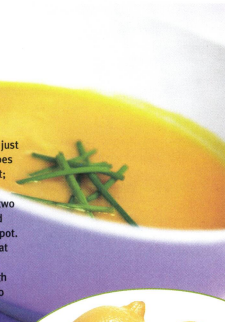
APPETISERS

Winter eating

It's tempting on cold, wet winter days to choose comfort food for lunch, such as hot chips or a greasy hamburger — or both. Instead, have a bowl of steaming-hot soup with a crusty bread roll or some toast. It'll warm you up just as well, with much less fat. Many commercially made soups are low in fat but can be high in sodium. You could look out for reduced-salt varieties or make a batch of your own at the weekend and freeze it to take to work throughout the week. Here's our recipe for low-fat pumpkin soup (it makes about four bowls):

3 cups pumpkin, cut into cubes
1 onion, chopped
Water
½ tsp dried thyme leaves
2 or 3 chicken stock cubes, crumbled
1 clove garlic
Salt and pepper to taste
1 tsp fresh parsley

Put the pumpkin and onion into a saucepan and just cover them with water; add the thyme, stock cubes and garlic and heat to boiling point. Reduce heat; simmer, uncovered, for 30 minutes or until the pumpkin is soft. Transfer it to large bowl. Puree two cups of the pumpkin mixture in a blender or food processor, and return the pureed mixture to the pot. Repeat with the remaining pumpkin mixture. Heat the pureed mixture till boiling; reduce heat. Add salt and pepper to taste (there's probably enough salt in the stock cubes). Simmer uncovered for 10 minutes. Sprinkle with parsley to serve.



WENDY MARSHALL

WARNING: Mercury in fish

The Australia New Zealand Food Authority has warned pregnant women or women considering pregnancy to limit the amount of certain fish they eat to a maximum of four serves per week.

Fish such as shark, ray, swordfish, barramundi, gemfish, orange roughy, ling, southern bluefin tuna (not canned tuna) and freshwater fish caught in warm waters are at the top of the food chain and live quite a long time. High levels of mercury can accumulate in their bodies, potentially affecting a foetus. The effects of mercury are subtle, and may involve delayed walking and talking.

This doesn't mean pregnant women should avoid fish altogether. Most people wouldn't eat more than four serves of fish a week anyway, and it's important that women continue to benefit from the nutrients fish provides — it's an excellent source of protein, low in saturated fat and high in unsaturated fat and omega-3 oils. Once the baby's born and has started breastfeeding, there's no need to limit fish intake because very little mercury has been found in breast milk.

Still fat...

The amount of fat we eat in Australia is decreasing, yet as a nation we're still getting fatter. How can this be when we've been told for years that fat's the key to weight loss?

There are many schools of thought, but one theory is that while we've heeded the low-fat message, we're still overeating. A recent study shows that people with a diet relatively low in fat eat more sugar, increasing the amount of kilojoules (energy) consumed. Avoiding a high energy intake is crucial to maintaining or losing weight: if your energy intake exceeds your energy expenditure, you'll inevitably gain weight.

So what should you do? Remember that fat-free doesn't mean kilojoule-free. Carry on eating foods that are low in fat (particularly avoid saturated fat, mainly from fatty meat, dairy products, palm or coconut oil, cakes, pastries and biscuits). But to maintain a healthy weight you also need to watch your overall energy intake and increase your energy output, so — you knew it already — get off that chair and go for a brisk walk!

To get even more juice out of a lemon or any other citrus fruit, put it in the microwave on high for about 30 seconds.

Fish in your muesli bar?

Sounds revolting, doesn't it? It could soon be a reality, with new technology set to add tuna oil to a range of products including muesli bars, yoghurt, ice cream and milk drinks.

Fish oil is high in omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids, and research has shown they can lower LDL cholesterol and triglycerides in the blood. Both contribute to heart disease. Food Science Australia and Clover Corporation have developed the technology, believing they've overcome the major limitation of using fish oil as an ingredient — the taste. So you won't have to eat a tuna-flavoured muesli bar.

This is just one of many new developments in the ever expanding industry of 'functional' foods. They're food products that have been altered to enhance their health or nutritional benefit. Currently food products can't make health claims on their packaging, but this is under review by the Australia New Zealand Food Authority. CHOICE would like to see health claims stay off our food products: a balanced diet is essential for good health, not a few foods making specific claims.



4 YEAR INDEX

July 1997 — June 2001

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Bold type indicates a test, survey or trial report, normal type indicates other articles.

* Indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items or letters. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts, many other small pieces, and Recalls and Bans.

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CARING FOR YOUR FEET

Written by a respected podiatrist, this book will help you understand how feet work and gives foot health information for everyone from children to grandparents.

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SURVIVING

SURVIVAL

Life After Cancer

'I have had numerous achievements since my cancer experience (academic success, successful job, public recognition, etc) and here I sit hardly able to put one foot in front of the other . . .'

▲ Miles Little ▲ Christopher Jordens
▲ Kim Paul ▲ Emma-Jane Sayers

SURVIVING SURVIVAL:
LIFE AFTER CANCER

Miles Little, Christopher Jordens, Kim Paul, Emma-Jane Sayers
With a foreword by Professor Stephen Leeder, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Sydney

About one in three Australians will get cancer before the age of 75. Every year over 75,000 Australians are newly diagnosed with a serious form of the disease. Currently, around half will still be alive five years later, and survival rates have been increasing over the last 20 years.

This book is about the experience of surviving cancer, an experience that most people imagine to be pretty disturbing but also pretty wonderful. In the course of talking to cancer patients about their healthcare, however, the authors noticed that many survivors — people who appeared to be free of cancer after the phase of diagnosis and treatment — were less happy than might have been expected.

Time and again, they discovered a recurrent theme in survivors' narratives: that it was difficult to be a person who has had cancer, difficult to be a survivor, difficult to communicate the nature of their experiences.

For survivors, there's been no recognised way to talk about what it's like to bear the cancer label. For intimates and lay carers, the person they knew has come through the illness but is changed. For both, the experience is so strange that it can defy both their understanding and their stamina. Relationships that survive the illness may melt away in the aftermath, and that's a sadness almost beyond bearing.

This important book is a first step to finding ways to talk about the nature and meaning of cancer experiences, and to establishing support groups and education programs in which the particular status of survivors and their intimates is recognised.

\$25 CODE: SURV

new

NEGOTIATING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

A Practical Guide for Parents

David West

- Is your child having a problem at school?
- Whose problem is it — your child's or the school's?
- What's the best way to approach the teachers or the principal?
- Is there anything you can do to "problem-proof" your child?
- How can you work with the school to make the whole school better?

Negotiating With Your School shows how problems can be solved using simple steps at the most basic level. Drawing on his experience as parent, teacher and mediator, David West has devised an easy system to get even the most inexperienced parent started. The ADOPT system involves admitting there's a problem, discussing it and looking at options, making proposals to solve the difficulty and setting a time to review the solution to see if it's working.

This book is an invaluable resource for parents, carers and advisers. It includes advice on finding the right time to talk to your school (whether state or private), what to do if the first approach doesn't achieve anything, suggestions for letters that might get results, and what happens if you reach an impasse. There's information on suspensions, questions of privacy, and on how to negotiate with your child, as well as a chapter for non-custodial parents.

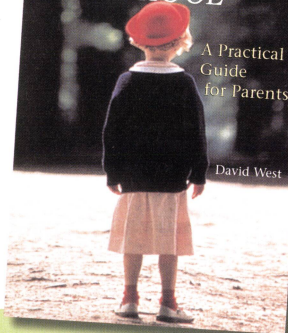
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CHOICEBOOKS

NEGOTIATING
WITH YOUR
SCHOOL

A Practical
Guide
for Parents

David West

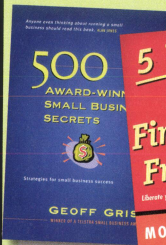


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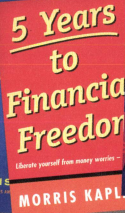
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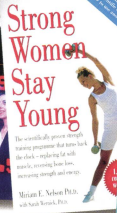
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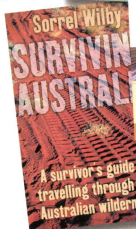
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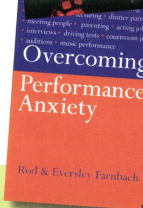
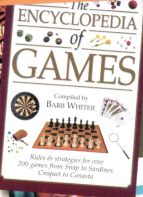
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HAIRLESS

— but not painless

Dry cat's dung, vinegar, quicklime, arsenic, caustic lye, clam shells, cotton thread or a barbed needle coated in sulphuric acid — they've all been used to remove hair. Now you can be zapped or lasered. Take your pick.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Rule # 1:** *There's no way to permanently remove hair — and if any service provider or treatment makes such a claim or implies it, they're sailing close to the wind.*

■ **'Clinical' treatments** *(as opposed to at-home ones) like electrolysis and laser removal are expensive, painful and there are potential side effects. (See Potential risks or side effects?, page 34). However, they're still quite popular.*

■ **Before you undertake any major hair removal treatment, get professional advice (see Ask a professional, far right). A good start is to ask your GP.**

HAIR REMOVAL'S A PUZZLING ritual, as is its replacement. Balding men often go to considerable expense and discomfort having it put back, and one distressing side effect of chemotherapy is hair loss. Yet we spend considerable amounts of money and energy deliberately removing hair from our bodies.

To a certain extent it seems to be a cultural thing. In a country like Australia with a strong beach and sun image, the less body hair on a woman (it's mainly women), the better. Whereas in, say, some European cultures there's less apprehension — sometimes there's even excitement — over a bit of body hair peeking out.

There's nothing new about the practice. There's evidence that in 4000–3000 BC people used a depilatory method to remove hair, admittedly one rather more aggressive than is available today: natural arsenic trisulphide, quicklime and starch made into a paste. Of course, then hair removal had as much to do with class distinction as it did with hygiene in a hot climate.

Most modern methods aren't new, either, though today's commercial market shies away from bat's blood, dried cat's dung or quicklime. There's shaving (wet or dry), epilators (electric plucking), waxes, depilatory lotions and creams, and growth inhibitors; and there's also electrolysis and laser treatment — which we're looking at here.

Laser treatment's the only recent innovation in that list (see *How they did it way back when*, page 34, for some interesting details of early hair removal methods).

CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS

There are essentially three ways of removing body hair: cutting it at the skin surface, pulling or plucking it out by the root and killing the individual root.

Surface removal

Take your pick from shaving (wet or dry, mechanical or electric) or depilatory lotions and creams (usually

calcium thioglycolate). Depilatories chemically dissolve hair at the skin surface and are cleaned off after about 10 minutes. Neither method is very long-lasting.

Root removal

If you haven't got enough to do, plucking's pretty time-consuming. More conventional methods include epilators and waxing, the latter being by far the more popular. (See *Hair removal at home*, March 2001, for more information on these options.)

These methods have a longer-lasting effect than shaving or depilatories — some claim up to eight weeks.

Hair massacre

Electrolysis and laser treatment are claimed to do this. They're professional treatments, though you can get home electrolysis kits.

Neither electrolysis nor laser treatment can guarantee to kill all hair follicles, so they're not a permanent solution, though they may reduce the overall amount of hair. They're ongoing and expensive.

■ **Electrolysis.** A fine needle is inserted into the hair follicle and electronically charges the hair root to kill it.

■ **Laser treatment.** A laser beam is used to do much the same thing — basically disable the hair follicles. Some estimates suggest that it can remove about 30–40% for up to a year. In the US the FDA won't allow manufacturers to claim that hair won't grow back, but they allow claims of permanent hair reduction. Hair that grows back has a finer texture.

■ **Growth inhibition.** Growth inhibitors are chemical compounds used in conjunction with hair and root removal treatments. Applied after removing hair, they penetrate the open hair follicle, eventually slowing regrowth.

WHAT'S INVOLVED?

Electrolysis and laser hair removal are the most complex and expensive treatments.

Electrolysis

Galvanic (needle-type) is the most commonly used method of electrolysis. A needle is inserted into the hair follicle and an electric current applied. The body salts and tissue moisture are converted into a lye (alkaline) solution that has a caustic effect on the tissue and hair follicle, destroying the hair. Only a small area should be treated at a time.

There's a new type of electrolysis called the TE System, which has FDA approval and has been used in the US for a few years. This system uses tweezers rather than a needle to deliver the current down the

Ask a professional

Electrolysis and laser hair removal treatments aren't free of side effects (see *Potential risks or side effects?* for more, page 34). So be as cautious about either of these treatments as you would about any other major treatment of your body.

- Check the practitioner's **qualifications**. Training courses for beauty therapists to perform electrolysis and laser treatment are conducted by TAFE as well as local beauty schools.
 - Check that the **training** they've completed is recognised by the Vocational Education Training Employment Commission and the VET Accreditation Board, and that the school conducting the course is a registered training organisation. (This also applies if you're interested in becoming a beauty therapist.)
 - You should have a proper **consultation** with whoever is to perform the procedure before having even a test treatment, such as for laser hair removal (where they test your skin).
 - In fact, a good start would be to **ask your GP for advice**, or go to a professional association to locate a certified service in your area. They're listed in the Yellow Pages and you'll easily find them on the Web as well.
- Some of the professional organisations in Australia include:
- **Association of Professional Aestheticians of Australia (APAA):** www.apaa.com.au; email apaa@qldnet.com.au; phone (07) 5575 9364; fax (07) 5575 9723; PO Box 96, Robina 4226.
 - **Australian Beauty Association:** www.space.net.au/~aba; email aba@space.net.au; phone (08) 9228 9660; fax (08) 9228 9659; PO Box 168, Mount Lawley 6929.
 - **Cosmetic Physicians Society (Australasia):** www.cosmeticphysicians.org.au; email cpswa@cosmeticphysicians.org.au; infoline 1902 292 502; 3 Seymour Avenue, Dianella 6059.

hair shaft, and includes using a highly conductive electrolytic solution on the hair.

Laser

There are four main types of laser treatment.

■ **Ruby.** This is the most common, and penetrates the deepest of the laser treatments. The energy delivered by the ruby laser heats the pigment in the hair shaft and eventually destroys the cells in the hair follicle. It requires fewer treatments than electrolysis.

Darker hair absorbs more laser energy and is easier to treat, and coarse dark hair responds the best. Blonde or red hair is difficult to treat. Light skin makes the process easier because it allows more of the laser energy to reach the hair follicle; darker skin can be treated but it's slower and takes more treatments because the darker pigmentation absorbs too much of the laser energy.

■ **Alexandrite.** This is a newer technique, and works in a similar way to the ruby laser.

■ **Nd:YAG** (neodymium:yttrium aluminium garnet). This is usually used to remove tattoos and pigmented lesions. For hair removal it's used with a carbon lotion spread on the skin. It must penetrate far enough into the hair follicle for the follicle to absorb the laser

HOW THEY DID IT WAY BACK WHEN

Thank heavens for modern technology, because through the ages your choices included the following.

Waxing

■ Sugar, lemon and other natural ingredients cooked to the consistency of soft taffy (a high sugar content helped inhibit bacterial growth in a hot environment). No, you didn't eat it, you stuck it on your skin.

Growth inhibitor

■ Bandages impregnated with vinegar and cat's dung.

Depilatories

■ Quicklime, starch and arsenic.
■ A poultice of caustic lye to burn away hair. (Check out Electrolysis, page 34, for a comparison!)

Epilation

■ Plucking individual hairs between halves of a clam shell.
■ 'Threading' by lacing a cotton string through the fingers and running it over the leg to encircle and pull out the hairs.

Other types

■ Inserting and twisting a barbed needle coated in sulphuric acid into the hair follicle to kill the root.

wavelength, which destroys the hair cells. It isn't always successful, and there's potential risk of skin injury or a tattooing effect.

■ **Diode.** This method of laser treatment isn't used much and its efficacy is still being studied, though the FDA approved its use in 1999. The main difference is that this method can be 'tuned' specifically to an individual's skin type and hair colour.

POTENTIAL RISKS OR SIDE EFFECTS?

You can't go around zapping your skin or pointing a laser at it without some side effect. The most common one is temporary reddening of the skin. But if the procedure is performed properly by a trained professional, it shouldn't be permanent; and of course potential side effects may vary from person to person.

■ **Electrolysis.** Potential risks include infections and scarring.

■ **Laser.** Potential risks include skin redness (which

could last up to 15 days), skin discolouration, infection, scabs, and an outbreak of cold sores.

Basic advice for after-treatment behaviour is to avoid the sun; if you must go out, definitely wear sunblock and cover up. Some clinics advise you to stay out of the sun altogether for a month after treatment. Others also suggest that you avoid irritating the skin with perfumes or after-shave for the following 24 hours.

THE PRICE OF SMOOTH SKIN

It's not cheap. With both types of procedure, you'll need several treatments over time.

■ **Electrolysis:** Can vary upwards from about \$100 an hour. If your treatment session is shorter than that it'll cost less — say \$25 for 15 minutes.

■ **Laser:** A test treatment can cost about \$100 or more. Ongoing treatments can cost anywhere from about \$80 to \$700 per hour, depending on the clinic or service provider you go to.

NOT AS PERMANENT AS PROMISED

Joanne tried laser hair removal in 1997 after she'd read an article in a women's magazine that said it would remove hair permanently. Previously she'd been waxing for about two years, and before that shaving.

Joanne has brown hair and fair skin, and wanted the treatment for underarm and bikini line hair. She found a place in the Yellow Pages and went for a consultation, but doesn't recall being informed of any qualifications or professional association membership.

During the consultation she was told that, "Laser treatment works best on coarse, dark hair because that type of hair easily absorbs the energy from the laser," and "it feels like being flicked with an elastic band." She was quoted a price for the treatment, which eventually took eight visits.

She was charged, "\$1200 for the first treatment (\$600 for each area), \$800 for the second treatment (\$400 for each area), \$600 each for the next two treatments, and nothing for the next four treatments."

The process involved "zapping the hairs individually, and on the whole it wasn't that painful. I found it generally less painful than waxing; however, when some individual hairs were zapped it was just as painful. These tended to be the darker hairs. They gave me ice packs to apply to the area before zapping and I found this helped a lot."



Her expectations were high, she said, after reading the article that said laser hair removal was permanent. "I still get a little bit of regrowth, which is disappointing; however, they're fine lighter hairs that aren't nearly as bad as dark, coarser hairs. It was expensive, but in the long run I'm happy with the result."

On the whole Joanne would recommend laser treatment, but has one regret that's a salutary piece of advice: "Immediately after each treatment I blistered and it took about a week for the blistered skin to heal. They told me that blistering is common, depending on your skin type. I wish I'd known this before my first treatment because I'd have scheduled it for a week before my beach holiday rather than the day before."

Indeed. At the very least: ask about qualifications, professional membership and for details about the procedure and possible after-effects before agreeing to the treatment.

Across between a mountain and a road bike, hybrids have chunkier tyres than road bikes — great for riding on bumpy city roads, as well as dirt roads — but not as chunky or small as mountain bikes, which makes it easier to cycle on pavement. Hybrids also allow the upright riding position of mountain bikes, which makes for a relaxed style of riding, and gives you a good view of traffic and scenery.

We bought hybrids costing about \$600, which is what you'd pay for a reasonable-quality bike designed for occasional riding or commuting short distances (10–15 km each way, say). Our test included an expert assessment of their construction quality, a user trial to test their rideability and a brake performance test.

CONSTRUCTION

Two bicycle experts (see page 39) assessed the quality of parts, how easy basic maintenance is (changing a tyre, adjusting brakes and gears) and value for money. We also asked them to rank the bikes from best to worst, on which they largely agreed.

Three of the bikes — **AVANTI**, **GIANT** and **IRON HORSE** — came equal top for construction, with the **MONGOOSE** and **APOLLO** a fair way behind. Specific comments on some of the bikes are listed in the *Profiles* (see page 36). The main complaint was about the quality of assembly — loose nuts and bolts, and wheels out of true (see *Assembly problems*, page 39, for more on this).

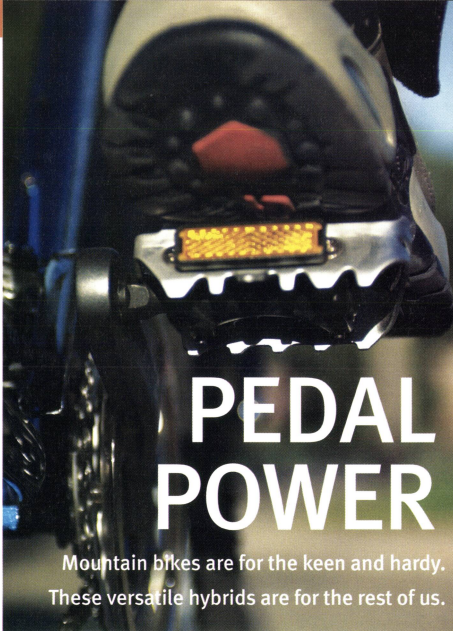
VANESSA MARSHALL

USER TRIAL

Seven experienced cyclists from the Sydney-based cycle club, BikesNorth, rode the bikes over a variety of surfaces, including road, bike path, gravel track and grass. They assessed comfort, operation of the gear and brake mechanisms, performance and overall impression.

The trial encountered problems, some to do with the poor initial assembly of the bikes, that required varying levels of repair or adjustment, including brake pads dragging on the rims and two loose handlebar stems (including one where the handlebars could be completely pulled away from the bike). Luckily we had enough mechanically minded bike riders with us for these to be fixed on the spot, but they could present more of a problem for someone with little or no knowledge of bike repairs — they'd have to be taken back to the shop.

The users scored the **GIANT**, **IRON HORSE** and **MONGOOSE** equally highly in the user trial, with an overall rating of 'good'.



PEDAL POWER

Mountain bikes are for the keen and hardy.
These versatile hybrids are for the rest of us.

BRAKE TEST

We tested the braking distance for all bikes. The Australian Standard specifies that the bike must come to a full stop within 5.5 metres of applying the brakes at a speed of 24 km/hour. All bikes met this criterion.

We also tested a couple of the bikes with wetted rims, to simulate stopping in the rain. Stopping distances were two to three times longer than in the dry, and would probably be even greater when the road is also wet — so beware.

WHAT TO BUY

GIANT Cypress 2001	\$575
IRON HORSE Adventure	\$579

These two bikes came equal top in the expert assessment and the user trial. However, you may find features on the other bikes that make them a good buy for you — for example, the bike riders in the trial liked the **MONGOOSE** as much as these two, though the experts rated it a bit lower.

IN A NUTSHELL

- Hybrids are a cross between mountain and road bikes, offering the versatility of on-road and light off-road riding.
- We looked at the hybrids' construction quality, tested their braking performance, and took them for a test ride. See the profiles on pages 36–37 for more.
- Some of the bikes hadn't been assembled very well when we picked them up, with some poor enough to be dangerous. See *Assembly problems* page 39, before you hit the shops.

Profiles

The bikes tested are profiled in rank order from top to bottom, left to right. Prices shown are recommended retail. All the bikes have the following good features:

- Steel front forks.
- Alloy wheel rims.
- Suspension seatpost.
- Quick-release front and rear wheels and saddle.
- V brakes.

GIANT CYPRESS 2001

Price: \$575

Construction

■ Rated equal best by the experts. It has good-quality construction, consisting of an aluminium frame and well-built wheels with 36 stainless-steel spokes. It's let down by its screw-on rear hub (cassette rear hubs are stronger) and gear-shifting mechanism.

User trial

- Equal best: rated well for handling and cornering and, unlike other bikes on test, has a comfortable saddle.
- The gears aren't particularly easy to use — there's an intermittent setting between the main gears, which could be a problem for beginners.



Avanti Discovery

IRON HORSE ADVENTURE

Price: \$579

Construction

- Rated equal best by the experts, and best for components: rapid-fire gear shifter, 24 gears, cassette rear hub, stainless-steel spokes and aluminium frame.
- Considered best value for money by the bike experts.

User trial

- Equal best: rated highly for acceleration, balance, hill climbing, handling, cornering and control at high and low speeds.
- Handlebar grips are comfortable, with the brake and gear levers well positioned. Gear shift levers are easy to use and accurate.
- The pedals came with toe clips, which can make pedalling more efficient.
- The short wheelbase may not suit some riders, particularly those with long arms and legs. The handlebars are also narrow, with a short reach to the brake levers suited to smaller riders. The handlebar stem isn't adjustable.



Giant Cypress 2001

AVANTI DISCOVERY

Price: \$550

Construction

- Good construction and assembly, although there were some weak points, such as a screw-on rear hub and some cheap components.

User trial

- Reasonably well-balanced, and rated well for hill climbing and shock absorption.
- The gear display is easy to read but difficult to understand because the numbering is in reverse — so the lowest gear (the one for going up hills) is numbered 7 rather than 1. If you've ever ridden another bike, you might find this difficult to get used to. The colour scheme is also confusing — the front set of gears is colour-coded orange for going uphill, while for the back gears, green is for uphill.
- The saddle fitted on the bike we bought was very broad and was considered uncomfortable.



Iron Horse Adventure

MONGOOSE CROSSWAY 250

Price: \$522

Construction

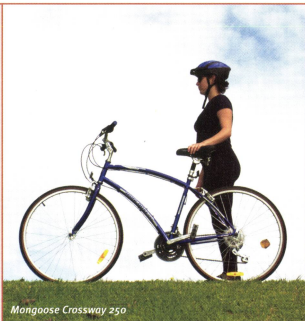
Considered poor value for money by the bike experts, mainly because of the steel frame and cheap components. It has a screw-on rear hub, carbon steel rather than stainless steel spokes, and plastic pedals, which could be a problem for heavier riders.

User trial

Equal best: scored well for cornering, balance, shock absorption and range of gears.

A comfortable ride, thanks to a good upright riding position, comfortable saddle and long wheelbase. It rolls very well, and the slick tyres make for easier riding on smooth roads. Good for short, leisurely trips.

The gears are difficult to use; the grip shifts are hard on the hands and confusing — you can't always tell what gear you're in.



Mongoose Crossway 250

APOLLO CROSS ROADS

Price: \$619

Construction

Considered poor value for money by the bike experts, mainly because of average-quality components at a high price.

Narrow front and rear forks make it difficult to remove wheels.

User trial

Rated positively for handling, balance, cornering, and control at high and low speeds.

Uncomfortable saddle, and the grip-shift gear changers are uncomfortable and hard to use, and also make the brake levers difficult to reach.



Apollo Cross Roads

TESTER'S TIP

Triallists remarked that the bikes in the trial all performed very differently and that a quick ride around the bike shop's car park wouldn't give you a good enough idea of what to buy.

If you're in the market for a bike and not really sure what you want, some bike shops hire bikes out. They may even have the exact bike you're interested in available for hire, so you can try it out for half a day for a pretty reasonable cost.

Hybrid bikes

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE			SPECIFICATIONS						
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Trial score (%)	3 Expert score (%)	Type of gear shifter	Frame	Weight (kg)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Warranty	RRP (\$)*
GIANT Cypress 2001	76	75	77	Grip shift	Aluminium	13.8	China	Giant Bicycle	60 days (A)	\$75
IRON HORSE Adventure	76	75	77	Two levers	Aluminium	12.6	China	Iron Horse / Norco Australia	Not stated	\$79
AVANTI Discovery	68	65	75	Grip shift	Aluminium	13.8	China	Avanti Bicycle	5 years (B)	\$50
MONGOOSE Crossway 250	68	75	53	Grip shift	Steel	14.0	Taiwan	Gemini Bicycle	'Lifetime' (C)	\$22
APOLLO Cross Roads	56	60	46	Grip shift	Aluminium	13.5	China	Apollo Bicycle	5 years (B)	\$619

* Recommended retail price.

(A) Parts and labour, after that parts only: frame 20 years, other parts one year (doesn't cover stunts or jumps, etc).

(B) Frame; other parts one year (doesn't cover stunts or jumps, etc).

(C) Lifetime for the frame with 'normal use', for as long as the bicycle is owned by the original owner; other parts one year, except tyres, tubes and cables (doesn't cover stunts or jumps, etc). Doesn't include labour.

1 Overall score

The overall score includes:

- Trial score: 70%.
- Expert assessment score: 30%.

2 Trial score

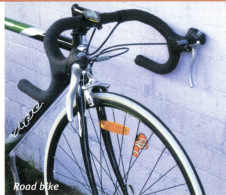
This score is the triallists' overall rating of the bike for comfort, ride and performance.

3 Expert assessment score

The expert score is based on:

- Quality assessment (including assembly, frame, wheels and components).
- Value for money.
- Ease of use (removing front and rear wheels, and adjusting brakes and gears).

All were weighted equally.



Road bike



Hybrid bike



Mountain bike

What to look for

Buy from a bike shop, rather than a department or variety store. Some advantages include: a better range to choose from in terms of type and quality, with a variety of frame sizes; expert assistance and advice; the opportunity for a test ride; a fully assembled bike; a free tune-up after the bike's been 'broken in'; and you can get your bike serviced there by people who know the model well.

Try out a few bikes. And don't buy too far from home — if you have problems with the bike, as we did, it may be inconvenient to keep taking it back to the shop. Besides, you'll need to go back at least once for a tune-up.

■ Do you want a **road, mountain or hybrid** bike? If you're going to get into some serious racing or want to cycle long distances on good roads, you'd probably do best with a road bike. If you want to ride regularly on bush tracks and other rough terrain, a mountain bike is for you. If you're an 'in between' rider, the hybrid is a versatile combination.

■ Think about the **specs and features** you want, and look for a bike that offers them. Apart from minor parts like the pedals or saddle, it's usually uneconomical to upgrade a bike's components (installing better gears, say). If the saddle is uncomfortable, ask the shop to change it. You shouldn't have to pay any extra for this, but if you do, it will be money well spent.

■ Bikes come with different **frame sizes**, so it's important to get the one that fits you best. As a rough guide, you should be able to straddle the top tube with your feet flat on the ground and a clearance of 2.5–5 cm for street riding, and 5–10 cm for off-road riding — 5 cm is a good compromise for a hybrid. It gets a bit more complicated if the top tube isn't parallel to the ground: a knowledgeable bike shop assistant should be able to help you.

■ With **gears**, more is not necessarily better — if you don't use them, you'll simply be wasting your money. If you're riding in fairly flat areas,



Double-lever gear shifter



Grip gear shifter

WHAT ABOUT INSURANCE?

You'd be mad to drive your car without third-party insurance, and as a cyclist you're equally liable if you hurt someone or damage property. There are cycling organisations in every state, as well as a national one, which offer members free third-party property and public liability insurance with cover ranging from \$5 million to \$20 million. The cost of joining these organisations varies from state to state (the range is \$25 to \$63 per year), and a small additional payment can cover others in your household.

CYCLING ORGANISATIONS THAT OFFER THIRD-PARTY INSURANCE

- **Bicycle Institute of South Australia:** phone (08) 8271 5824; www.bisa.asn.au. (Note: People living in the NT can join the Bicycle Institute of South Australia or the Cycle Safe Club of Australasia, right.)
- **Bicycle NSW:** phone (02) 9283 5200; www.bicyclensw.org.au.
- **Bicycle Queensland:** phone (07) 3844 1144; www.uq.net.au/~zzbikeq/.
- **Bicycle Tasmania:** phone (03) 6229 3811; www.netspace.net.au/~dmurphy/bt.htm.

- **Bicycle Transportation Alliance WA:** phone (08) 9420 7210; <http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/wa/bta/>.
- **Bicycle Victoria:** phone (03) 9328 3000; www.bv.com.au.
- **Cycle Safe Club of Australasia:** phone 1800 639 634; www.bv.com.au/html/csca_ben.html.
- **Pedal Power ACT:** phone (02) 6248 7995; <http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/community/pedalpower/>.

OTHER USEFUL ORGANISATIONS

- **Bicycle Federation of Australia (BFA):** phone (03) 9827 4453; www.bfa.asn.au.
- **Cycling Australia** is the principal body for the competitive sport of road, track and mountain bike cycling in Australia. Phone (02) 9764 2555; www.cycling.org.au.

you won't need as many as you would on hilly terrain.

Gear shifters can be either lever shift or grip shift (see below left). Lever shifters tend to be easier to use, and can be either single-lever (usually on top of the handlebar) or double-lever, also known as a rapid-fire system, with one lever to shift up a gear, and one to shift down. Grip shifters, which look like collars around the handlebar, are easy to reach.

However, it's also easy to accidentally change gears when riding along and they can be tiring on the wrists, particularly if you're doing a lot of changing up and down.

■ The **frame material** is a matter of great controversy. In theory, aluminium is lighter so you get a lighter bike. However, to get the same strength as steel, the tubes are often made much bigger, so in fact there's very little difference at all. In terms of strength, steel is the better bet: warranties on aluminium frames are typically five years, with 'lifetime' for a steel alloy.

Overall, it's much of a muchness between steel and aluminium at this level of bike. If you want the benefit of a really light, strong material, you'll need to spend a lot more and get an exotic aluminium alloy, titanium or carbon fibre frame.

Assembly problems

You'd think you could buy a bike and simply hop on and ride it home. However, most of the



Seven experienced cyclists from the BikesNorth club took the bikes for a day's test ride to rate them.



Testing spokes by pressing sideways.

bikes we tested weren't properly assembled — some to the point of being dangerous. For instance, four of the bikes had a loose headset (the bearing assembly that connects the front fork to the frame), which can affect steering. Worse still, the handlebars of one bike pulled out of the socket during the user trial. Some problems are the fault of the manufacturer, particularly wheel build, but retailers should give the bikes a thorough inspection before selling them.

When you're in the shop, there are some basic checks:

- Fiddle with the **brake pads** to ensure they're firmly attached, lined up with the wheel rim and not rubbing on the rim or tyres. Pull on the brake levers and make sure there's good contact between the pad and rim.
- Grip the front wheel between your legs and try to twist and lift the **handlebars**. There shouldn't be any sideways give, and they

definitely shouldn't pull out of the socket.

■ Grab hold of the **cranks** near the pedals and try to move them towards and away from the frame. If one crank moves but the other doesn't, it could be loose. If both move, the bottom bracket could be loose. This test isn't foolproof, but you should take it up with the sales assistant.

■ Make sure the **seat** doesn't swivel sideways or up and down.

■ Turn the bike upside down, and for each **wheel**, look at it from front on, give the wheel a spin and check that it's true (it doesn't wobble). Try pulling the wheels out of the 'dropouts' (the little U-shaped part that holds the axle) without loosening the bolts — make sure they're well and truly intact. Check the **spokes** are tight by pressing them sideways (see above).

■ When you take it for a test ride, use all the **gears** and make sure the chain doesn't jump.

If you find any problems ask the shop assistant to fix them on the spot.

THANKS TO THE EXPERTS

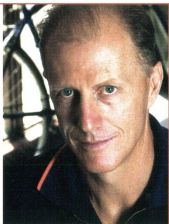
John Hardwick

John has a long career in both road and mountain bike (MTB) racing. He's represented Australia in MTB World Cup races and world championships, and won the Australian MTB Hill-Climb Championships. He's worked in the bicycle trade for 14 years with various retail stores, and is currently technical journalist with *Bicycling Australia* magazine.



Steve Hogg

Steve has been riding and racing bikes for the past 27 years. He owns and operates Pedal Pushers, a niche bicycle business specialising in mechanical work and rider positioning — every bike sold is built to order from scratch. He's also worked as a race mechanic and a warranty service technician, and has been a technical contributor to *Bicycling Australia* magazine for six years.



BRONIA THWATE

WANT MORE INFO?

Go to www.choice.com.au and type 'hybrid bicycles' in the search box for more detailed information on bike components and tips when buying.

They're handy, compact, and with anti-shock you can even take one jogging.

Music on the MOVE

IN A NUTSHELL

I If you want to move around a lot while listening to CDs, get the **SONY D-EJ611** — it handled a faulty CD, a jog and a fairly bumpy drive without any problems with sound. And it's got the second best sound quality in the test.

A portable CD player's very nifty: you can have music on the move, and some people even use them in a small room instead of a full-size player — the tested models can all be attached to speakers as well as headphones.

So how much can you move about with them without the music pausing and jumping? Given that they're supposed to be portable devices, we bought eight models with an anti-shock feature to find out.

We couldn't fault the anti-shock feature of the **SONY D-EJ611** — the sound wasn't affected by a badly scratched CD, by jogging or even driving. The anti-shock capability on the other models varies — see the table below for scores. Pick one with a high score for faulty CD/anti-shock if you want to make the most of your player's portability.

All the models have a range of repeat, random play and programmable playback functions, and they're all fine for sound quality, though the **SONY**, **ALTEC** and **SANYO** are noticeably the best.

WHAT TO BUY

SONY D-EJ611	\$189
ALTEC ACD-85	\$129
SANYO CDP-1100CR	\$139

	PERFORMANCE				5 FEATURES							
Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Sound quality score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Faulty CD / anti-shock score (%)	Line-out socket	Intro Mode	Bass Boost	Hold	Plays CD-RW disks	Car kit supplied	AM/FM radio	Program list
SONY D-EJ611 (A)	85	81	80	100	✓		(C)	✓				View, add, alt
ALTEC ACD-85	79	83	70	78	✓	✓	✓	✓				View, add, alt
SANYO CDP-1100CR	74	75	68	78	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		View only
TEAC PD-P225K	72	66	74	89	✓	✓	(D)	✓		✓		View, add, alt
PANASONIC SL-SX220	69	67	66	78	(B)		✓	✓				View only
VOXSON CD50TK	69	62	76	83	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	View, add, alt
AVANTI CD-153	68	64	80	67	✓	✓	✓		✓			View, add, alt
AKAI APCD-022	63	63	74	53	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			View, add, alt

* Rounded to the next 5 mm, all protruding parts included.

** Excluding batteries, CD and earphones or headphones.

*** Prices shown are a good target to aim for, based on nationwide checks in February 2001.

ns Not stated.

(A) This model has been discontinued but may still be available in shops. The replacement model, D-EJ621, has the same 'G-Protection' anti-shock mechanism.

(B) Doesn't have a line-out socket, but the instructions say you can use the earphone socket for this purpose.

(C) Half boost or full boost.

(D) We found it has no effect. See What about the rest?

(E) Earphone warranty is for three months.

1 Overall score

We tested the CD players for sound quality, ease of use, their ability to cope with a faulty CD and their anti-shock function, weighting these factors as follows:

- Sound quality: 60%.
- Ease of use: 20%.
- Faulty CD/anti-shock performance: 20%.

2 Sound quality score

This included both listening and technical tests, weighted as follows:

- Listening tests: 60%.

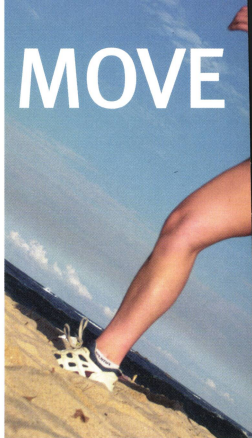
(Using the earphones supplied with bass boost on and a stereo system with bass boost off.)

Technical tests: 40%
(Frequency response, total harmonic distortion, signal-to-noise ratio and channel separation measured through the earphone socket with bass boost on and the line-out socket for stereo connection) with bass boost off.)

3 Ease of use score

We assessed the following aspects:

- Reading the markings and operating the controls: 40%.





VANESSA MARSHALL

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

■ The **TEAC** and **PANASONIC** are next best for sound quality after the top three, although the **TEAC**'s bass boost feature didn't have any effect in our tests. It didn't work on a second model either, so we told **TEAC** we'd found "no noticeable difference in sound" with bass boost on. It said this is "correct"! Compared with the top three these two models aren't such good value for money.

■ The **VOXSON** is the only model with an AM/FM radio, but it scored the lowest for sound quality, and its controls are small and tricky to use.

■ While the **AVANTI** is easy to use, it's nothing special for sound or handling faulty CDs — but it is cheap. The **AKAI**'s slightly worse again in all scoring categories.

IFICATIONS

ion D; mm)	Weight (kg) **	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Target price (\$)* **
6 x 140	0.19	1	Malaysia	Sony	189
6 (diameter)	0.24	ns	China	Strathfield Group	129
6 x 145	0.22	1	China	Sanyo	139
0 x 140	0.21	1	China	Teac	179
0 x 135	0.19	1	Japan	Panasonic	169
0 x 145	0.27	1 (€)	China	Voxson	169
5 x 160	0.25	1	China	GAF Control	96
0 x 150	0.24	1	China	Prima / Akai	115

- Reading the indicator display: 20%.
- Loading and unloading a CD: 20%.
- Programming tracks: 20%.

4 Faulty CD/anti-shock performance score

We assessed how well the CD players handled a scratched CD, movement from jogging and a reasonably bumpy car ride, weighting each as a third of this score.

5 Features

See *What to look for*, page 42, for an explanation of these.

PROFILES

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order. See the table below for their scores and which features they have. Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in February 2001. Anything lower is a bargain.

SONY D-EJ611

Target price: \$189

This model has been discontinued, but may still be available in shops. The replacement model, D-EJ621, has the same anti-shock mechanism.

Good points

- Impressive anti-shock feature, especially for jogging and car motion, and it handles scratched or dirty CDs very well.
- A good range of playback features, including functions for repeat, random play and programming — the only model that can be set to play one track then stop.
- Battery status indicator.



BUCHSBA THAKATE

■ Switching off doesn't erase programming until the lid's opened.

Bad points

- No intro playback mode (see *What to look for*, page 42).
- It can't play a CD-RW (a home-recorded CD that can be recorded over again — see *What to look for*).



ALTEC ACD-85

Target price: \$129

Good points

- Good anti-shock performance, and it handles scratched or dirty CDs very well.
- Good range of playback features including intro mode, repeat, random play and programming.
- Comes with mini-headphones instead of earphones.

Bad points

- If you open the lid while it's playing the disk still spins, which might let your CD be damaged (see *Taking care*, page 42).
- It can't play a CD-RW.



SANYO CDP-1100CR

Target price: \$139

Good points

- Good anti-shock performance, and it handles scratched or dirty CDs very well.
- Good range of playback features including intro mode, repeat, random play and programming.
- Includes a car kit: a car stereo cassette adaptor and car lighter power adaptor (see page 42).
- Includes rechargeable batteries.

Bad points

- Some controls and labels are small and hard to read.
- Sequences of programmed tracks can't be altered without starting from scratch.
- It can't play a CD-RW.

TAKING CARE

Though CDs are reputed to be almost indestructible, you still need to be careful with them: if you scratch the top (the side with the label), where all the data is etched under only a thin protective coating, it could easily affect the sound quality. The underside has a slightly thicker protective coating.

What to look for

Most important are **good sound quality** and **anti-shock capability**. Take a familiar CD when you're shopping, play each machine at the same volume or you'll tend to favour the louder models, and take your time to listen for good bass, treble and overall sound. Ask for a demo of its anti-shock feature.

Make sure the **markings** are clear. Try out the **buttons and switches**, and check that the **display** gives you the information you want and is easy to read.

Basic functions include play/pause, stop, skip/glide forward and skip/glide backward, and you'll want the following two options:

- **Earphones or mini-headphones:** The better the quality, the better your ears will like them. Those included with the CD players tested are reasonable quality. Buy similar-quality or better replacement ones if they're damaged, rather than a bargain-basement variety.

- **Line-out socket:** Allows you to connect the CD player to a stereo system. All but the **PANASONIC** have one, and its instructions say you can use the earphone socket instead. You'll also need a connecting cord to do this; only the **TEAC** came with one.

All the models have the following useful **features** unless stated otherwise:

- **Intro mode** allows you to play the first few seconds of each track in order to find the one you want. The **PANASONIC** and the **SONY** don't have it.

- **Bass boost:** A switch that allows you to increase the volume of the bass (lower-frequency sounds) — good with earphones because their speakers generally don't

reproduce these frequencies well. The **SONY** is the only model that allows you to select either half or full boost, and the bass boost of the **TEAC** had no effect in our tests.

- A **hold** button or switch allows you to prevent the CD player's functions from being activated by mistake — useful when you're jogging or it's in your bag. The **AVANTI** and **VOXSON** don't have one.

- **Can play CD-R and CD-RW:** All the models tested can play CD-Rs (home-recorded CDs that you can record on once), but only two (the **AVANTI** and **AKAI**) can play CD-RWs (CDs that can be recorded over repeatedly).

- **Anti-shock/ability to play a faulty CD:** A portable CD player really needs to have this feature. It works on memory, which is limited, so if it has to work hard you'll generally hear an interruption at some point; the **SONY** was an exception.

- **Battery status indicator:** Indicates that battery power is low; some — the **SONY** in this test — also show you roughly how much charge is left.

- **Track number indicator:** Shows the current track.

- **Total tracks indicator:** Shows how many tracks are on the CD.

- **Track time indicator:** Shows how many minutes long each track is; the **AVANTI** and **TEAC** don't have it.

- **Total time indicator:** Shows the time necessary to play the whole CD; the **AVANTI** and **TEAC** don't have it.

- **Functions to repeat some or all tracks, to play programmed tracks and to shuffle or random play** some or all tracks. All models can also repeat programmed tracks, and the **PANASONIC** and the **SONY** can repeat all tracks in

shuffle mode. See the table for whether programmed lists can be altered without starting from scratch.

- **Auto off:** After a set period of silence the CD player switches off, which is useful for conserving the batteries.

- **Recharge batteries in the player** (the **TEAC**'s instructions don't say it can do this, but all the rest can): just leave them in, connect your AC adaptor to the designated socket on the CD player, then plug it into a power point and turn it on. Some CD players need to be switched to a charge setting and some do it automatically.

A car kit allows you to run the CD player through the cassette player and speakers in your car — it has an adaptor for the cassette player and another for the cigarette lighter socket for power (or you can just use the batteries). If they're not supplied with the player, they're available from electronics shops like Dick Smith and Tandy.



PHOTO: THOMAS

IN A NUTSHELL

The test: 12 medium-size fridges ranging in capacity from 385 to 420 litres: suitable for a small family.

Two models provide something a little different — a two-way opening door on one, and a separate fruit and vegetable storage compartment on the other.

See below for more on these innovations.

There's a new, tougher star rating system for fridges — see New energy labels, below, for more.

The SHARP Fresco has a clever innovation: the main door can be opened both to the left and the right, thanks to a lock-and-release hinging system — when you pull on one side, the hinge on the other side locks in place so the whole door doesn't come off (we tried pretty hard but couldn't do it!). This would be very convenient in practically any kitchen — and great if you often move house.

The drawback? The freezer is a drawer, and it proved awkward to get at things buried at the bottom — it was more like a chest freezer in this respect.

The FISHER & PAYKEL E415H has three doors: the third is a roll-out fruit and vegetable bin. It looks like a crisper, but it isn't. For one, it's not humid enough, so food dries out (the instructions explain this, and suggest you wrap green vegetables and the like before putting them in). Second, it's not quite as cold as the rest of the fridge, so it won't suit all foods.

You can access it without opening the main door of the fridge, and it's very large. However, as it doesn't have the advantages of a conventional crisper, your fruit and vegetables may not last as long. The instructions suggest you also use it for storing drinks and tall bottles, but with the warmer temperatures you may find the drinks aren't cold enough for you. In sum, we don't think it's as useful a feature as it could be, and it could end up being a waste of space.

NEW ENERGY LABELS

Since an energy labelling scheme was introduced in 1986, appliances have become more efficient, to the point that many had very high star ratings, making comparison almost meaningless for consumers.

In October 2000 a new star label energy rating with tougher standards was introduced — so a fridge that would have received five stars under the old system might now get only 2.5. (The new label can be identified by a green band at the base — see right.) The government hopes this will create a greater incentive for manufacturers to

ALL PHOTOS: PHOTODISC THOMAS

FRIDGES

It's nice to see some new, potentially handy ideas in fridge design, even if they don't all work out too well in practice.

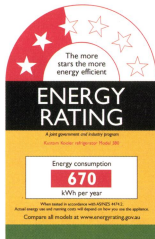
continually improve energy efficiency and technology. The comparative energy consumption figure (in annual kWh) remains unchanged and is the most accurate way of comparing models. Use the stars for a rough comparison of models of a similar size, then look for the lowest kWh rate.

Minimum energy performance standards (MEPS) were introduced at the same time, which means all fridges sold in Australia must meet minimum requirements for energy efficiency and help reduce greenhouse emissions — and, in the process, save you money.

WHAT TO BUY

FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart E411T (freezer on top)	\$1278
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart E402B (freezer on bottom)	\$1334

These were clearly the best in the test for performance and among the best for ease of use (see the table, page 46, for their scores). You'd probably also be fairly happy with the other five models we've profiled (see pages 44–45), especially if you found them at a good price.



The new energy rating label — you can identify it by the green band.

THINGS THAT GO BUMP, GURGLE AND SHUDDER IN THE NIGHT

When you get a new fridge, it's almost certainly going to make a range of strange noises that might have you checking the house in the middle of the night. Once you get used to it, though, you'll tune them out and not notice. And when Grandad tries to tell you fridges weren't so noisy in his day, he's probably right: modern fridges tend to be noisier for a number of reasons, including different insulation, energy-efficient compressor design and components used to keep the fridge frost-free.

Fridge magnets aren't very stylish ...



... so it's probably just as well they won't stick to a stainless steel fridge.

Profiles

Models are profiled in rank order from left to right. Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping February 2001. Anything lower is a bargain. See the table on page 46 for details of features and scores.

FISHER & PAYKEL ACTIVE SMART E411T

Target price: \$1278
Freezer on top
An electronic fridge with pushbutton controls, it has an alarm that sounds when the door is left open or if a fault is detected. It scored well for cooling down a load at room temperature fast and keeping vegetables fresh in the crisper, and handles changes in external temperature reasonably well. The temperature controls for each compartment are relatively independent, but the temperature steps in the fresh-food compartment are quite large. There's more variation in the temperature uniformity of the fresh-food compartment than in some other fridges. It doesn't have a chiller compartment.



FISHER & PAYKEL ACTIVE SMART E402B

Target price: \$1334
Freezer on bottom
An electronic fridge with pushbutton controls, it has an alarm that sounds when the door is left open or if a fault is detected. It scored well in most aspects of testing, although it isn't as energy-efficient as some other fridges. It's the best on test at keeping vegetables fresh in the crisper and cooled down a load at room temperature quite fast. The temperature controls are relatively independent, but the temperature steps in the fresh-food compartment are quite large. There's very little temperature fluctuation as the compressor stops and starts. It handles changes in external temperature well. It doesn't have a chiller compartment.



SHARP FRESCO SJ-W39J-WH

Target price: \$1007
Freezer on bottom
This fridge has a very convenient door-hinging mechanism: you can open the door from either the left or right. For storage, though, it's the deepest and narrowest in this test, with few shelf adjustment positions and no dairy compartment. The bottom-mounted freezer is a drawer, which makes access to frozen food a little more difficult. Its crisper is good at keeping food fresh, and it handles changes in external temperature well. Its controls allow a good range of combinations between the fridge and freezer, and temperatures are relatively uniform throughout each compartment.



WESTINGHOUSE FREESTYLE RJ422S

Target price: \$1249
Freezer on top
The interior is well designed, giving good storage versatility — overall, this fridge is easy to use. It's good at keeping food fresh in the crisper, the controls allow a good range of temperature combinations between the fridge and freezer, and there's very little temperature fluctuation as the compressor stops and starts. However, it's relatively slow to cool down a load at room temperature, and the main bottle shelf in the door is a bit on the warm side.



FISHER & PAYKEL ACTIVE SMART (INOX) E415H

Target price: \$1690

Freezer on top

An electronic fridge with pushbutton controls, it has an alarm that sounds when the door is left open or if a

fault is detected. It has a third compartment: a pull-out fruit and vegetable bin under the fresh-food compartment (see page 43 and right for more on this).

This fridge is the fastest at cooling down a load of food at room temperature. It also handles changes in external temperature well. The temperature controls for each compartment are relatively independent but the temperature steps in the fresh-food compartment are quite large. There's more variation in the fresh-food compartment temperature than in some other fridges, and also considerable fluctuation in temperature as the compressor stops and starts. It doesn't have a chiller compartment.



NEC DOUBLE MULTI- FLOW FR-393

Target price: \$949

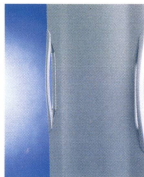
Freezer on top

The controls allow a good range of temperature combinations, although suitable freezer control settings were generally below the position

marked as 'minimum', which may be confusing. There are also considerable temperature fluctuations in the freezer as the compressor stops and starts. This fridge has a very good freezer temperature reserve (it can achieve much colder than -20°C). However, it's not very versatile in terms of where you can store food, and there's no dairy compartment.



The Sharp Fresco's door (below) that can be opened from both sides would be handy in most kitchens. The Fisher & Paykel E415HRI's vegetable drawer (bottom) isn't humid enough to store some fruit and vegetables well for long, or cold enough to store some other foods.



WHIRLPOOL WRN42RWG6

Target price: \$1079

Freezer on top

The controls allow a good range of temperature combinations between the fridge and freezer, and the 'mid' setting provides good food

storage temperatures. Unfortunately, though, fresh food may freeze with changes in external temperature in winter unless you reset the controls. The design and wording of the controls could be confusing: 'cold' is a warmer setting, for example. There's also some variation in the temperature of the fresh-food compartment, and storage versatility is limited.



What to look for

■ **Size:** Allow at least a couple of centimetres at the sides, back and top of the fridge for **air circulation**. Make sure the door opens in the right direction for your kitchen or is reversible.

■ **Freezer:** Top-mounted freezers are generally more **energy-efficient**, but most bottom-mounted freezers have convenient slide-out baskets, as well as giving you easier access to the fresh-food compartment.

■ **Energy efficiency:** Consider long-term running costs as part of the purchase price. While the number of stars on the energy label helps compare models of a similar size, pay particular attention to the **kWh per year figure**, which gives a more accurate indication.

■ **Shelves:** Make sure you can **arrange the shelves** easily to accommodate your groceries, including tall items and bottles. If the fridge will be in a corner, make sure you can remove shelves with the door open at a 90° angle.

■ **Moving and cleaning:** Look for **rollers** for easy moving, and **brakes or feet** to keep the fridge in place. Check for **smooth, easy-to-clean surfaces** and avoid models with dirt traps.



Features and accessories

■ Look for a **chiller** if you need to store meat and fish. Its temperature should be close to freezing and ideally it would have a separate temperature control.

■ A **chill zone** close to the cold-air outlets is handy for cooling drinks quickly, but food left there too long could freeze.

■ A **dairy compartment** keeps butter or cheese slightly soft for easy use.

■ **Crisper** drawers should be well sealed to keep vegetables fresh; and check that the air outlets don't blow into them, as this will dry food out faster.

■ Also look for **ice trays** and other special containers you'd find particularly useful.

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre checked the fridges to see how easy they are to use by someone with a disability.

For people with poor vision

■ A good light and clearly marked controls are essential. The fridges with the best lighting are the three **FISHER & PAYKEL**s, while the **KELVINATOR** and **WESTINGHOUSE Mastermind** have the most clearly marked controls.

■ Some electronic fridges, including the **FISHER & PAYKEL**s and **WESTINGHOUSE Mastermind**, sound a warning alarm if they're left open. The door of the **SHARP** isn't self-closing, and it's possible to leave it ajar without noticing.

For people in a wheelchair

■ A bottom-mounted freezer tends to make using both compartments easier. The **FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart E402B** has the most accessible space, followed closely by the **KELVINATOR** and the **WESTINGHOUSE Mastermind**. The **SHARP** isn't recommended for many wheelchair users because the fresh-food compartment is too deep and the freezer drawer is difficult to access. In fact all the models in this test are a little too deep for wheelchair users to easily reach the back of the compartment.

■ Sliding shelves can also be useful — the **MITSUBISHI**'s and **NEC**'s are easiest to use.

For people with weak or arthritic hands

■ Open-style handles like those on the **KELVINATOR**, **FISHER & PAYKEL**s (**Elegance** and **Inox** ranges) and **SHARP** are the best.

■ Controls with large knobs or slide bars are easiest to manipulate. The **WESTINGHOUSE Mastermind** has the best.

■ Two small crisper drawers (like in the **FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart E402B** and **KELVINATOR**) are easier to use than a single large one, and pull-out compartments should be stable.

For people with a bad back

■ If you use the freezer a lot it's better on top; if you don't, go for a bottom-mounted one.

■ Temperature controls should be easy to reach without bending.

385–420 L fridges

PERFORMANCE

Brand / model

FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Elegance E411T	75
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Elegance E402B (A)	74
FISHER & PAYKEL Active Smart Inox E415H (B)	66
NEC Double Multi-Flow FR-393 (C)	66
SHARP Fresco SJ-W391-WH (C)	65
WESTINGHOUSE Freestyle RJ42ZS	65
WHIRLPOOL WRN42RWG6 (C)	65
WESTINGHOUSE Mastermind BJ42S5	63
PANASONIC NR-B39AX9 (C)	61
MITSUBISHI Electric MR-395E-W-A	57
LG Express Cool GR-4325F	56
KELVINATOR Opal NB400G	53

1 Overall score (%)	2 Performance score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)
75	75	74
74	73	76
66	66	64
66	67	62
65	67	57
65	63	72
65	66	62
63	60	77
61	59	67
57	55	67
56	55	61
53	49	71

- * Measured dimensions include hinges and any protrusions at the back, such as the compressor, rounded to the next 5 mm.
- ** This is the basic warranty; some manufacturers guarantee some parts for longer.
- *** Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in February 2001.

- (A) The Elegance is white and has metal handles and glass shelves. It's also available as the Active Smart Tassan, which is white and has white handles and plastic shelves. A door conversion kit allows the opening direction to be reversed after purchase on the Tassan.
- (B) The Inox series has a stainless steel door. It's also available as the Active Smart Tassan, which is white and has white handles and plastic shelves. A door conversion kit allows the opening direction to be reversed after purchase on the Tassan.
- (C) Discontinued, but may still be available in stores.
- (D) With difficulty and, with the Fisher & Paykels, not all shelves or drawers.
- (E) The Sharp is hinged on both sides and can be opened in either direction. Chiller has its own temperature control.
- (F) Has two half-width drawers.
- (H) This fridge has a roll-out fruit and vegetable bin, but it isn't humid enough to work well as a crisper.
- (I) A container with a lid is provided.

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on performance and ease of use, weighted as follows:
Performance: 80%.
Ease of use: 20%.

2 Performance score

Four factors were included in the performance score, weighted as follows:

- Temperature performance: 30%.
Energy efficiency: 30%.
Cooling time: 25%.
Crisper freshness: 15%.
- More on temperature performance:**
A good temperature for a fridge is 3°C and for a freezer it's -18°C. The temperature performance score is a measure of the fridge's ability to manage basic cooling temperatures in all compartments, and is based on the following factors:
- Is the temperature for both the fridge and freezer appropriate when the controls are set on "mid" or on the recommended setting? (15%).
 - Is there an adequate range of temperatures to satisfy the needs of most users? (25%).
 - Can the fridge and freezer cope with changes in outside temperature? (25%).
 - Are compartment temperatures generally uniform? (15%).
 - Does the thermostat allow too large temperature fluctuations? (20%).

3 Ease of use score

The ease of use score consists of:
■ Versatility of food storage, including adjustability of shelves and ease of storing items of different shapes and sizes: 60%.
■ Ease of cleaning: 30%.
■ Ease of understanding and setting temperature controls: 10%.

4 Cooling time

This test shows the fridge's ability to handle a difficult cooling job in the fresh-food compartment. We measured the time it takes to cool down a 20 kg load in the fresh-food compartment by 15°C on a hot day. The result is included in the performance score.

5 Running costs over 10 years

The running cost is calculated from the energy used over 10 years, at a rate of 12.5 cents per kilowatt hour. A 10-year period provides a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy usage — and you should expect your fridge to last at least that long.

6 Claimed vs measured energy use

The energy tests indicate how much energy a fridge might use in a year to maintain an acceptable temperature in both the fresh-food and freezer compartments. Several

FEATURES							SPECIFICATIONS							
6 Claimed / measured energy use (kWh / year)	7 Noise level (dB)	Shelves removable when door open to 90°	8 Door hinge position	9 Chiller	9 Crisper drawers	9 Dairy compartment	Freezer location	Measured dimensions (H x W x D, mm)*	10 Claimed gross volume, fresh food (L)	10 Claimed gross volume, freezer (L)	Warranty (years)**	Manufacturer / distributor	Origin	Target price (\$)***
599 / 586	36	Except crisper (D)	R or L		1	✓	Top	1700 x 640 x 695	314	97	2	F&P	NZ	1278
719 / 711	36	Except freezer drawers (D)	R or L		2 (G)	✓	Bottom	1700 x 640 x 695	280	123	2	F&P	NZ	1334
741 / 722	36	(D)	R or L (B)		1 (H)	✓	Top	1700 x 640 x 695	229 + 85	97	2	F&P	NZ	1690
647 / 632	39		R only	✓	1		Top	1750 x 720 x 670	278	115	2	NEC	Korea	949
660 / 740	40	✓	(E)	✓	1		Bottom	1730 x 590 x 700	279	116	1	Sharp	Thailand	1007
730 / 798	38	✓	R or L	✓ (F)	1	✓	Top	1635 x 690 x 725	298	124	1	Electrolux	Australia	1249
530 / 605	37		L only	✓	1		Top	1765 x 670 x 670	266	119	2	Whirlpool	Korea	1079
750 / 807	37	✓	R or L	✓ (F)	1	✓	Bottom	1700 x 690 x 725	262	153	1	Electrolux	Australia	1452
770 / 743	39		R only	✓	1		Top	1730 x 675 x 700	274	116	2	Panasonic	Taiwan	899
728 / 739	39		R only	✓	1		Top	1700 x 640 x 670	275	120	5	Mitsubishi	Thailand	999
710 / 795	39	Except chiller (D)	R only	✓	1	✓ (J)	Top	1720 x 680 x 670	269	123	2	LG	Korea	942
930 / 875	43	Except crisper and freezer shelf	R or L	✓ (F)	2 (G)	✓	Bottom	1675 x 650 x 745	265	135	1	Electrolux	Australia	1199

of the models used more energy than their labels claimed.

7 Noise level

We measured the noise level of each fridge during normal running; more noise is produced when the compressor starts up and also during the defrost cycle. The design of your kitchen and the fridge's location also make a difference to what you'll hear. These models are all moderately quiet in daytime ambient noise but may seem louder at night. (See *Things that go bump, gurgle and shudder in the night*, page 44, for more.)

8 Door hinge position

None of the models tested has a door that can be reversed after purchase — not good in a nation of regular movers.

9 Features

See *What to look for*, page 45, for more on these.

10 Claimed gross volume

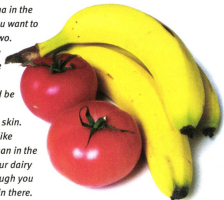
The volume quoted by the manufacturer tells you approximately how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage. Use the volumes to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh-food compartment, so you can choose a fridge that meets your storage needs.

TESTER'S TIP

Cool bananas

Try placing a ripe banana in the dairy compartment if you want to keep it an extra day or two. Dairy compartments are usually warmer than the rest of the fridge, so the ripening process should be slowed down without damaging the banana's skin.

Ripe tomatoes also like warmer temperatures than in the average crisper, so if your dairy compartment is big enough you could try keeping them in there.



VANESSA MARSHALL

HOW RELIABLE HAVE OUR SUBSCRIBERS FOUND THEM?

We asked a group of subscribers whether their fridge had needed repair in the past 12 months. There wasn't much difference in reliability between brands, and fridges are generally a reliable appliance — only 10% overall had needed repair.

The graph shows the results for brands for which we received sufficient replies (the number in brackets tells you how many readers reported on the brand). The results include all types of fridges, not just those in this test. Differences of more than 7% are meaningful.

PERCENTAGE NOT NEEDING REPAIR

All fridges (18,599)	90
Sharp (677)	95
Samsung (174)	92
Whirlpool (669)	92
Fisher & Paykel (5136)	90
Kelvinator (2738)	90
Westinghouse (5880)	90
GE (666)	87
Amana/Kleenmaid (323)	85

PERCENTAGE WHO WOULD BUY THE SAME BRAND AGAIN

Fisher & Paykel (5190)	93
Westinghouse (5907)	90
Whirlpool (670)	90
GE (672)	88
Amana/Kleenmaid (323)	87
Kelvinator (2741)	86
Sharp (674)	86
Samsung (171)	80

How safe are SMALL CARS?

Perhaps a little safer than they used to be...



IN A NUTSHELL

■ **High-speed crash test** results show that clever design and airbags offer good protection even in small cars.

The latest round of high-speed crash tests released by the Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) looked at small cars.

The test consists of two crashes:

■ **Offset crash:** The car is crashed at 64 km/h into a fixed barrier with a crushable aluminium face. Only 40% of the car's front (on the driver's side) impacts with the barrier.

■ **Side-impact crash:** A 950 kg trolley is run into the driver's side at 50 km/h.

In addition, a pedestrian impact test was introduced in 2000. It estimates injuries to pedestrians struck by a vehicle at 40 km/h (see the table for ratings).

WHAT'S ASSESSED?

The **overall rating** (see the table) is based on assessments of the car's **structure** and **restraint** systems, and measurements of **injury risks**. The pedestrian rating isn't included in the overall rating.

Crash test results are only comparable for vehicles of similar weight — as a guide, cars have to be within 230 kg of each other.

Structure

- The passenger compartment should keep its shape.
- The steering column, dashboard, roof, roof pillars, pedals and floor panels shouldn't be pushed excessively inwards, so there's less risk of injury.
- Doors should remain closed during the crash (so occupants can't fall out of the car), yet easy to open after the crash (so occupants can get out, or rescuers in).

Restraint system

- The seat, seatbelt and — if fitted — the airbag(s) are supposed to keep the occupants inside the car, protect them from contact with hard car parts (such as the

MORE RESULTS

For detailed results from this latest round of ANCAP crash testing, as well as the results for all the cars crashed since the start of the program, go to www.choice.com.au and type 'crash tests' in the search box.

KEY TO THE TABLE

Good = ✓✓✓
Acceptable = ✓✓
Marginal = ✓
Poor = ✗

steering wheel, dashboard or windscreen), and spread the force of the impact over body parts that can cope best.

■ Crash test dummies are painted with paint that rubs off on contact. This, together with a slow-motion video of the crash, shows which, if any, body parts hit parts of the car.

Injury risk

■ Crash test dummies representing an average adult male are fitted with sensors that measure the forces and movements likely to injure the head, chest and upper and lower legs. In the offset test, there's also a passenger dummy.

■ The results for head and chest injuries are combined to indicate the risk of life-threatening injuries.

Make/model/year (airbags ranked in order of overall rating)	Overall rating (%)	Restraints	Structure	Pedestrian rating (%)	Weight (kg)
Toyota Echo, 2000 on (dual) (A)	89	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	36	900
Mercedes Benz A140, 1999 on (dual + side) (A)	85	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	Not rated	1070
Audi A3, 1997 on (dual + side) (A)	79	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	33	1090
Holden Astra, 1999 on (dual) (A)	78	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	19	1100
Peugeot 206, 2000 on (dual) (A)	78	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	31	940
VW Golf, 1998 on (dual + side) (A)	77	✓✓	✓✓✓	46	1140
Daihatsu Sirion, mid-2000 on (dual)	71	✓✓✓	✓✓	39	850
Toyota Corolla, 1998 on (driver) (A)	71	✓✓	✓✓✓	43	1060
Hyundai Accent, 2000 on (driver)	68	✓✓✓	✓✓	31	1070
Peugeot 306, 1997 on (driver) (A)	56	✓✓✓	✓	17	1110
Mazda 323 Protégé, 1999 on (driver)	54	✓	✓	57	1120
Ford Ka, 2000 on (driver) (A)	52	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	24	900
Nissan Pulsar, 2000 on (driver)	47 (B)	✗	✗	52	1120
Daewoo Nubira, 1999 on (driver)	41 (C)	✓	✗	34	1280
Daewoo Lanos, 1998 on (none)	23 (D)	✓	✗	38	1060

Source: ANCAP.

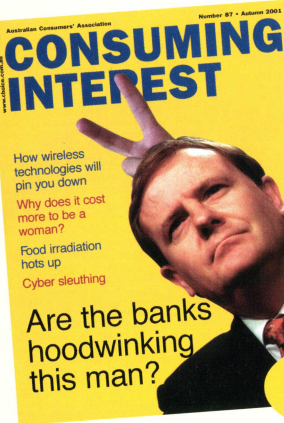
(A) This model was tested by Euro-NCAP, which uses the same high-speed crash test format as ANCAP. However, the results should be used as a guide only. While the testing procedures of Euro-NCAP and ANCAP are substantially the same, the structure and safety equipment of Australian models may vary, so models sold in Australia may provide slightly different levels of safety from those described here.

(B) Risk of serious neck injury.

(C) High risk of life-threatening injury to driver's chest in side-impact test.

(D) High risk of life-threatening abdominal injury in side-impact test.

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☐ Amex ☐ Diners Club

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Name of cardholder

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INS/0106

Post this coupon to: Australian Consumers' Association, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204,
or fax it to (02) 9577 3355. ACN 000 281 925 ABN 35 799 246 568. **This may be used as a tax invoice.**

Our website has more information than even CHOICE itself – items that lend themselves better to the web medium than to print, for example, and some that are simply extra content to that published in the magazine.

If you're a current CHOICE subscriber you can get free trial access to the website. To register, just call us on (02) 9577 3399 and have your email address ready.

To whet your appetite, here are some picks from the current information available on www.choice.com.au.

IN THE NEWS...

Stay up-to-date with CHOICE Online's new 'breaking news' section – short and sweet news briefs about the issues that matter. Whether it's interest rates or insurance policies, frequent flyer programs or the food industry, if it's affecting Australian consumers today, it's likely to be in here.

Type 'in the news' in the search box on the home page to find the link to our list of current topics, then go straight to a specific topic by clicking on it, or scroll through the articles from the top for a general overview.

The Consumers' Association's policy is included with each topic, often with extra tips for consumers, and there are links to take you to related articles or media releases, useful sites or contacts.

This is also where you get the chance to vote in our latest poll. For example, what your opinion is on May's *Choice Cut* about the new No Sweat Shop label and the Homeworkers' Code of Practice.

GETTING MARRIED?

Are you, or is someone in your family, planning the BIG day? Type 'wedding sites' in the search box on the home page to get the word on wedding info on the web.

We've sorted through the online information: at their best, wedding websites give you garments, cakes and caterers at your fingertips, plus etiquette advice (if you want it). We also warn you what to be wary of.

We've included a list of links to useful websites, both national and local. While there aren't any online wedding directories specific to SA, Tasmania or the NT, residents of these areas can use the Australia-wide networks or check the web for individual traders in their district.

GETTING A QUOTE

Need a job done but not sure how to get the right price? Look no further – we've provided a simple checklist of points to help you get the best deal from tradespeople. Just type 'getting a quote' in the search box on the home page to find it.

In case the worst happens, there's also information about who to contact in each state or territory if you get into a dispute.

And you can link from here to our article: 'finding a good tradesperson' (first published in CHOICE, April 1999) – a step-by-step guide to increasing your chances of getting someone good.

LIGHT BULBS TEST

After 10,000 hours with long-life bulbs on test, our experts have finally called it quits (our last update was in CHOICE, October 2000). Type 'light bulbs' in the search box on the home page and click on the 'premium' article for the results.

We tested 23 models (10 samples of each) and regularly checked for failures. Buying one of the models with a low failure rate in our test increases your chances of getting your money back on lower power bills.

Most lasted their claimed life expectancy (or longer) and so will save you money in the long run, despite their high price (we calculated on \$25 per bulb) compared to conventional bulbs. After about 8000 hours 20 W models (equivalent to around 100 W incandescent) will have saved you around \$55, 12 W (60 W) would have saved \$25. And you'll have saved hundreds of kilograms of carbon dioxide if the energy was generated in a coal-burning power plant.



Like normal bulbs they lose light output over time, which becomes noticeable with a long-lasting bulb. Overall, our pick of the models that lasted 10,000 hours were the GE FLE11DBX (11 W) and GE FLE20TBX (20 W). They dimmed the least over time – some others dimmed by 30% or more.



(This test was made possible by funding from the Australian Greenhouse Office (AGO), the leading Commonwealth Government agency on greenhouse matters. CHOICE's published views, however, are independent of the AGO's.)

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TEST RESEARCH (NATA-accredited) provides independent, fee-for-service testing and research on consumer products, services and regulatory issues for other consumer organisations, governments and industry; under some conditions it undertakes public testing. Contact: Jeanette Dwyer on (02) 9577 3399.

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RECALLS & BANS

If you find a recall or ban not on our list, please let us know. Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after the recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

THE PRODUCT: Peugeot has recalled Peugeot 206 GTI vehicles, manufactured from 2001, with VIN ranges from VF32CRNF41175771 to F32CRNF41190577.

The problem: Possible braking imbalance may occur because incorrect tyres are fitted.

What to do: Contact an authorised Peugeot servicing dealer to arrange for repairs to be made free of charge.

THE PRODUCT: Ford has recalled all Ford Explorer UN model vehicles, built from October 31, 1996.

The problem: Under certain conditions one or both of the front sway bar links may break, possibly affecting vehicle balance and handling.

What to do: Contact any authorised Ford dealer to arrange for repairs to be made free of charge. For further information call Ford on 1800 333 306.

THE PRODUCT: Ford has recalled Ford Laser vehicles manufactured in February 2001.

The problem: The compliance plate is stamped with an incorrect (reversed) date format for February 2001.

What to do: Contact any authorised Ford dealer to arrange to have new compliance plates fitted.

THE PRODUCT: Hyundai has recalled EF Sonata passenger cars with 2.5 L engines that are fitted with a Siemens ECM (electrical control module).

The problem: The engine may stall due to possible electrical connection failure.

What to do: Contact your local authorised Hyundai dealer to arrange for repairs to be made free of charge.

THE PRODUCT: Land Rover has recalled Range Rovers, built from June 1994 to August 1998, with VIN ranges from MA300000 to WA410481.

The problem: Premature failure of the cooling system hoses may cause the car to break down. Traces of coolant (water and antifreeze) may remain on parts of the hot engine. The water content may evaporate and leave a high level of antifreeze, which can be corrosive and flammable.

What to do: Return the vehicle to your local authorised Land Rover dealer to arrange for the cooling system hose to

be replaced free of charge. For more information contact the Land Rover Australia Customer Response Centre on 1800 625 642.

THE PRODUCT: Alpen Products has recalled Alpen brand confetti with the word Glitz on the label. The Glitz confetti is multi-coloured and sold as a mixed bag of tissue paper confetti and foil-coated paper confetti.

The problem: The confetti contains aluminium, so may pose a choking or ingestion risk; foil confetti is banned in South Australia.

What to do: Return the confetti to the place of purchase for a refund. For further information call Alpen Products on 0414 861 955.

THE PRODUCT: Sweet Success has recalled 90 g Cherry & Coconut chocolate bars from Sweet Success branded fundraising charity boxes of 20 mixed chocolate bars that feature a use by date of 10/04/01, and were sold throughout SA, Queensland, WA, NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT.

The problem: The cherry and coconut-flavoured bars may contain peanut protein that isn't listed on the label and may cause an allergic reaction in some people.

What to do: People who are sensitive to peanuts shouldn't eat the chocolate bars. For further information, or to organise a refund, contact Sweet Success on (03) 9387 6999.

THE PRODUCT: Ferrero Australia has recalled Limited Edition 250 g Nutella in collectible glasses, with a use-by date between 17/1/02 and 9/3/02.

The problem: The glass packaging may suffer unexpected breakage at the rim, which may cause chips of glass to fall into the contents.

What to do: Don't open or eat the Nutella. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund. For further information, call Ferrero Australia on 1800 627 231.

THE PRODUCT: The Pascal Principal has recalled World Traveller's Plug Set – model ACP-1, which consists of five rubber plugs and a rubber holder with the IBM logo and IBM Global Network printed on the holder, sold

in Australia in gift box packaging in 1996.

The problem: It doesn't comply with the Australian Standard – the dimensions of the plug don't provide adequate protection against contact with the pins, increasing the risk of electric shock.

What to do: Don't use it. Return it to PO Box 446, Lane Cove 1595. For more information call (02) 9428 3500.

THE PRODUCT: JNH Australia has recalled Winnie the Pooh and Barbie ranges of children's beanbags and bean chairs.

The problem: Some of the bags and chairs still have the tab on the zip, allowing access to the polystyrene beans inside, which could cause an ingestion/inhalation hazard if the bag is opened.

What to do: Return the bags or chairs to the place of purchase for evaluation and/or a refund, or directly to: JNH, PO Box 4394, Mulgrave 3170. For more information call JNH Quality Assurance Department on 1800 660 655.

THE PRODUCT: MP Trading has recalled Lips Lamps, with approval number on the plug: N16194. The recall applies to the model with a coil-wire base only. It's in the shape of a pair of lips.

The problem: The lamp has an internally exposed screw that can cause users to receive an electric shock through the coil wire base.

What to do: Don't use the lamp. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

THE PRODUCT: Cheap as Chips has recalled Dolphin and Fish style freestanding lamps with a revolving inside feature and model no. 3.99G-2902. (Only one lamp was sold prior to the recall.)

The problem: Faulty wiring could possibly lead to electric shock.

What to do: Don't use the lamp. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund.

WARNING

THE PRODUCT: Toys R Us has issued a SAFETY WARNING about Cosco

Options 5 HI Chairs, with manufacturer no. 03-286 and Skn no. 715239.

The problem: The high chair can collapse if used incorrectly in reclining mode. The movable handle must be secured in the upward position at a right angle to the chair and secured over the towel bar.

What to do: Don't use it. Phone Toys R Us on (02) 9794 8951 during business hours (EST) to get a refit kit for the high chair (you'll need a screwdriver and to keep the existing screws). Or take it to your local Toys R Us for help.

THE PRODUCT: Ringrip has issued a PUBLIC WARNING about Cartoon

Character Night Lights with various plastic cartoon characters that fit over the night light, marked with Playcorp Cat No. N.L. or Ringrip Cat No. RNL 1. The lights were sold in Australia from 1995 to 1998.

The problem: Contact with live parts and possibly electric shock could occur if the light is used while the cover is separated from the base, which is plugged into a power point and switched on.

What to do: Unplug the light. Remove the cartoon character and test the attachment of the clear plastic cover to the base of the light. Don't use any tools. If the cover is at all loose, throw it away. If it shows no sign of damage you can continue to use it, but check it regularly, and avoid damaging the light by impact, say, with furniture or vacuum cleaners. For further information phone 1800 686 572, 9 am–5 pm (EST), weekdays, and quote the Ringrip night light.

Weekly updates of recalls and bans are posted on the CHOICE website at www.choice.com.au.

You can also email us any recalls or bans not on this list at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

THE HARD WORD

New 'INVISIBLE' tampons?



Does this mean that up to now, tampons have been visible?

GOOD FOR NOTHING SPUDS?

		COOKING GUIDE			
		COLIBAN	Best	Good	Fair
POTATOES	Salad/Boiling				✓
	Washing			✓	✓
	Frying/Chipping			✓	✓
COLIBAN	Baking/Roasting			✓	✓
	General Purpose			✓	✓

In that case, why do they bother growing them?

Friedland

COURIER

Portable Wirefree Doorchime

Simply install a new chime

- Weatherproof transmitter for outdoor use
- Ideal for homes without doorchimes

Who'd have thunk it?

These door chimes are ideal for homes without door chimes. Fancy that!

Aussie, Aussie, Aussie?

With the number of times 'Australian' appears on this tinned tuna label, you could be forgiven for thinking it's ... well, Australian. It's only when you read the fine print that its real origin — Thailand — becomes apparent.

But it's not a complete misnomer — the tuna is packed in Australian water. Yes, apparently we ship tonnes of spring water to Thailand and then import it back in cans of tuna. What's so great about Australian water (or so not-great about Thai water) that warrants this extravagance? Or is it simply a justification for emblazoning 'Australian' all over the label? Check out our cover story on this very issue.



DISPOSABLE SHEETS?

Since it seems you can't actually wash or dry them, you don't have much choice.

POLY COTTON PERCALE. DO NOT BLEACH. DO NOT SOAK. DO NOT WRING. DO NOT RUB. HAND WASH OR MACHINE WASH (48°). COLD RINSE. REDUCED SPIN. LINE DRY WITHOUT DELAY OR WARM TUMBLE DRY. DO NOT DRY CLEAN.

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FOR AUSTRALIA'S HOME FURNISHINGS GPO
BOX 3100 CANBERRA, ACT, 2601

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The Hard Word would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to T Anderson, G Bayer, A Daniels, J & M Dewdney, R Esmore, K Guiney, G Lagos and J Pantlin for their contributions to this month's Hard Word. Please keep sending them in.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.

A request from our art team: If you send us clippings, labels or packaging, please keep them as clean and neat as possible (and don't mark them with highlighters or pens or cut the corners off, etc) so we can reproduce them on this page. Thank you.

OK, so they're two separate ads ...

waverley cemetery

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... but the juxtaposition amused us!